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# DEGENERATIVE LUMBAR SPINE THERAPY

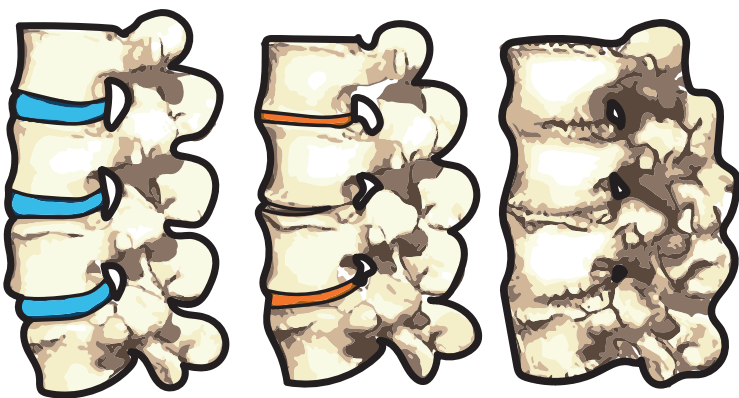
DALLAS OVERLY, PT, MPT

# DEGENERATIVE LUMBAR SPINE THERAPY

While there's no way to reverse a degenerative lumbar spine condition, there are many ways to compensate for and decrease pain. Our goal is to help patients understand their condition so that they can apply simple pain-relieving techniques in their lives. Oftentimes a patient can function with relatively little or no pain with simple modifications and treatments.

## What We Can Help With:

- ✔ Pain while sitting
- ✔ Pain while standing
- ✔ Pain in the legs
- ✔ Pain after working
- ✔ Pain after exercising
- ✔ Pain in the Low Back



Degenerative lumbar spine conditions are quite common in people over the age of 65. While there is currently no way to replace a degenerative spine, there are ways to conservatively manage the condition. Most importantly, a person with a degenerative spine must gain a thorough understanding of how and why some daily activities cause pain while others do not. Once a person gains this understanding, modifications can be made as to how they perform their activities. Often times he or she can function with relatively little or no pain.

# MEET OUR LUMBAR SPINE THERAPIST



## DALLAS OVERLY, PT, MPT Clinical Director

With a Bachelor Degree in Exercise Science/Physical Therapy Studies and a Master of Physical Therapy Degree, Dallas Overly graduated from the University of Utah in 2001. Additional therapy experience was gained at the University Hospital and The Orthopedic Specialty Hospital in northern Utah. Dallas continues to sharpen his skills through many continuing education courses.

Along with his wife, Janelle, Dallas has enjoyed raising his children in Gunnison. He has enjoyed seeing his children grow through all of their ups and downs. He has really enjoyed the additions that have come into his life as his children have grown and married wonderful individuals, making their family even more whole and complete. Dallas continues to work with the local school athletics, helping with injuries on and off the court.

Dallas enjoys the rural setting of Utah where he hones and uses his masterful skills, working with people in the Gunnison outpatient clinic as well as Gunnison Valley Hospital. During his 20+ years in physical therapy, Dallas has enjoyed the opportunity to work with people in almost every situation; including orthopedic and sports injuries, post-surgical rehab, neurological injuries, cardiac and pulmonary rehab, as well as balance issues, age-related conditions, and wounds.

## GUNNISON CLINIC



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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q: What happens when a spine degenerates?**

**A:** As we age, the disc's ability to hold water decreases and subsequently the discs shrink down in size. As the discs shrink, each vertebra moves closer together. This can be a problem for a couple of reasons. First, there can be increased pressure on small joints in the back of the spine called facet joints. Too much pressure on these joints can cause pain. Second, the canals where the nerves exit the spine become narrower. They can become so narrow that the nerves become pinched and pain in a leg may result. Nerves can also be pinched by abnormal bone growth, called bone spurs, which occur around the canals.



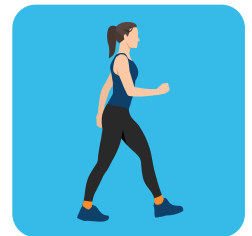
**Q: Why does standing cause more pain than sitting?**

**A:** Standing causes the spine to bend backwards (extend), whereas sitting causes the spine to bend forwards (ex). Any activity that causes the spine to bend backwards will increase joint pressure and close the canals where the nerves exit, resulting in back and/or leg pain. Any activity that causes the spine to bend forward will decrease joint pressure and open the canals where the nerves exit, resulting in back and/or leg pain relief. This is why some people with lumbar spine degeneration will bend forward when they walk.



**Q: Is walking the best exercise for someone with a degenerative lumbar spine condition?**

**A:** Not necessarily. Unless you can hold an effective pelvic tilt, walking often times irritates inflamed nerves and joints and results in increased back and or leg pain. While it is necessary to walk in order to get from one place to another, there are other aerobic exercises that will not aggravate a degenerative lumbar spine condition. Other options include bicycling, walking backwards in the pool, and rowing. These exercises place the lumbar spine in a flexed and pain free position.



**Q: Can the type of shoes I wear affect the pain I experience in my back and/or leg?**

**A:** Definitely! A shoe with heels, such as cowboy boots and women's dress shoes, cause the lumbar spine to bend backwards resulting in painful joint pressure and nerve pinching. It is much easier to hold a pelvic tilt standing when wearing shoes without heels.



**Q: What is the purpose of my home exercise program?**

**A:** Your home exercise program consists of carefully selected exercises tailored to your specific back condition. Doing these prescribed exercises at home will allow you to progress much more quickly with pain relief and increased mobility. It is common for patients to experience an increase in pain for 7 to 10 days when beginning an exercise program. This is normal and expected because the body is not used to performing these new activities.



# EDUCATION

## POSTERIOR PELVIC TILT

A posterior pelvic tilt is achieved by rolling the pelvic backwards or in a posterior direction. This will allow the spine to bend from the bottom up. The purpose of this activity is to decompress painful joint and open the nerve canals in the lumbar spine. This effectively decreases joint pressure and nerve pain. Anyone with degenerative lumbar spine condition should maintain a posterior pelvic tilt 100% of the time to open up the spinal column and reduce pressure on the nerves and bony structure.



## SLEEPING POSITIONS



Sleeping positions are very important when managing degenerative lumbar spine conditions. Proper positioning will allow a person to wake in the morning rested and feeling less pain. The pictures below demonstrate appropriate sleeping positions for people with degenerative lumbar spine conditions.

It is very important to hold the posterior pelvic tilt when sleeping. Sleeping in a “fetal” position on either side with the knees drawn up or on the back with the knees elevated is a good way to sleep because the pelvis naturally tilts posteriorly. Sleeping on the stomach with several pillows under the hips is also an acceptable position. Conversely, sleeping on the back or on the stomach are not good sleeping positions because the pelvis is naturally forced in the opposite direction causing painful joint pressure and nerve pinching.



## STRETCHES

### LOWER TRUNK ROTATION:

Lie with both feet flat on the surface and knees bent. Keeping your shoulders flat, allow your knees to slowly fall together to the side, rotating at your lower back as you do so. Return to the starting position and then allow them to slowly fall to the opposite side.



### CHAIR FLEXION STRETCH:

Sit in a chair and pull the upper body toward the knees.

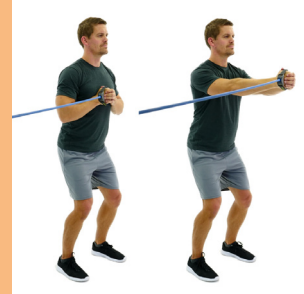


# FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY PROGRESSION

## ABDOMINAL BRACING

### Palof Press:

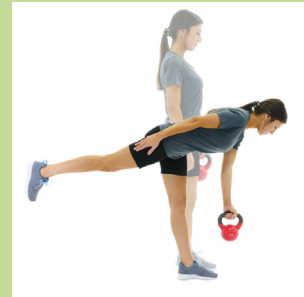
Begin by placing an exercise band securely in a doorway at chest height. Standing perpendicular to the doorway, slowly pull the exercise band towards you while engaging activating your transverse abdominus by drawing in your abdomen without moving your spine. Hold both your hands together and against your chest. Next, slowly straighten both your arms out in front of you. Do not let the tension of the exercise band turn you to the side.



## LIFTING MECHANICS:

### Instructions:

Starting position is standing in front of small object on floor. Start by bending forward at the hips and reach for the object with your right hand. As you bend forward slowly raise your left leg behind you. Keep your back straight and your abdominals tight. Pick up object and slowly return to starting position.



## POSTERIOR PELVIC TILT PROGRESSION

### Instructions:

Hold each exercise for 30 seconds and repeat 2-3 times. Generally, these stretches can be done 3-5 times a day. These exercises are designed to stretch the lower back, providing decompression of the lumbar joints and opening of the nerve canals. Often we find that patients prefer one stretch over another so you may choose to do any or all of them.



### POSTERIOR PELVIC TILT WALKING:

Hold posterior pelvic tilt while walking.



### WALL STANDING POSTERIOR PELVIC TILT:

Tighten the abdominal muscles and press lumbar spine into wall.

# FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT

## Instructions:

The purpose of this quiz is to help our therapists better educate patients regarding their degenerative lumbar spine conditions and how it relates to daily activities. Please indicate whether the following statements are true or false by circling "T" if the statement is true, "F" if the statement is false, or "NS" if you're not sure.

	T	F	NS
Walking is an excellent exercise for someone with a degenerative lumbar spine condition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sleeping flat on your back is a good sleeping position for someone with a degenerative lumbar spine condition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a person with a degenerative lumbar spine condition continues to participate in a painful activity, the pain will eventually decrease.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pulling your knees to your chest is a damaging activity for someone with a degenerative lumbar spine condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person with a degenerative lumbar spine condition should never exercise.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Standing for long periods of time can increase pain in someone with a degenerative lumbar spine condition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sitting is an effective way to manage pain caused by a degenerative lumbar spine condition.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person with a degenerative lumbar spine condition can bend forward and decompress painful joints and nerves.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A person with a degenerative lumbar spine condition can modify pelvic position to decrease pain while standing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High heel shoes place the lumbar spine in a less painful position during standing activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**SCAN OR VISIT TO LEARN MORE**



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