

Degeneration (osteoarthritis)

As with other joints in the body, the vertebral joints also show signs of wear. Figure 1 shows a vertebral joint with cartilage still in good condition. The causal reason for signs of wear in the vertebral column is the degeneration of the intervertebral disc, which loses its water content with increasing age and dries out. This then leads to a reduction in the height of the intervertebral disc (Figure 2 shows the loss of height of the lowest disc space) and the full shock absorber function is no longer guaranteed with the aging process.



Figure 1

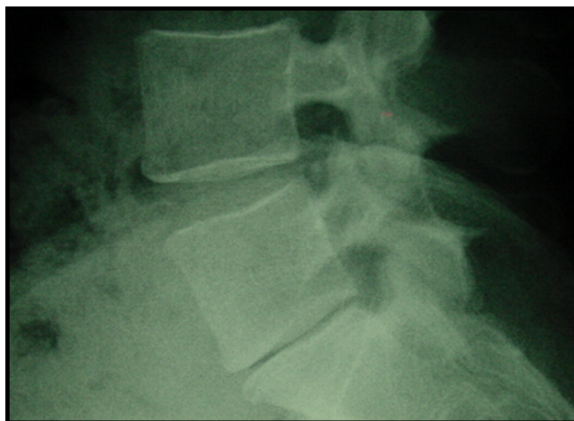


Figure 2

If the anatomical conditions at the front are no longer correct, the vertebral joints at the back will naturally also be misaligned, as in the case of a knock-kneed leg. This then leads to overloading of the vertebral joints and thus to arthrosis. Figure 3 shows a computed tomographic section through several vertebral joints with arthrosis (see arrow).

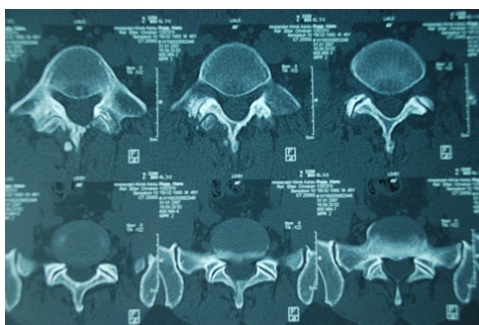


Figure 3

In this context, reference must be made to the frequently used term instability. Instability basically means an increased mobility of a spinal segment that exceeds the normal level. In the degeneration phase of the intervertebral disc, the reduction in height of the intervertebral disc can actually lead to increased mobility of the segment and also to vertebral slippage, which in turn overloads the vertebral joints and leads to their osteoarthritis. The vertebral displacement can then in turn lead to entrapment of the nerve structures. The degeneration process basically leads to a stiffening of the spinal column, which manifests itself in a reduction in function, whereby the above-mentioned instability can occur as an intermediate phase.

Arthrosis of the vertebral joints generally leads to pain directly in the spinal column, but can also cause pain in the extremities, as in the case of nerve entrapment. The most frequent symptoms are low back pain or neck pain. The offered therapy possibilities are immense. Basically, the arthrosis complaints are a domain of the non-surgical therapy. This includes adherence to back hygiene and physiotherapy and, in the acute stage, drug therapy. Alternative medical measures are also helpful. Only if these measures fail are injections under X-ray control indicated.