

EDUCATIONAL AND METHODOLOGICAL COMPLEX OF DISCIPLINE
MiF1202 «Morphology and human physiology»
Course – 1 Semester – 2
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Lecture 5 The skeletal system III

General Features of the Vertebral Column;
General Structure of a Vertebra, Intervertebral Discs;
Regional Characteristics of Vertebrae, Thoracic Cage

Outcomes:

1. Describe the general features of the vertebral column, intervertebral discs and those of a typical vertebra ;
2. Explain how the abnormal spinal curvatures (scoliosis, lordosis, and kyphosis) differ from one another.
3. Describe the special features of vertebrae in different regions of the vertebral column;
4. Name the components of the thoracic cage.
5. Describe the anatomy of the sternum and ribs and how the ribs articulate with the thoracic vertebrae

The vertebral column forms the neck and back. The vertebral column originally develops as 33 vertebrae, but is eventually reduced to 24 vertebrae, plus the sacrum and coccyx. The vertebrae are divided into the cervical region (C1–C7 vertebrae), the thoracic region (T1–T12 vertebrae), and the lumbar region (L1–L5 vertebrae). The sacrum arises from the fusion of five sacral vertebrae and the coccyx from the fusion of four small coccygeal vertebrae. The vertebral column has four curvatures, the cervical, thoracic, lumbar, and sacrococcygeal curves. The thoracic and sacrococcygeal curves are primary curves retained from the original fetal curvature. The cervical and lumbar curves develop after birth and thus are secondary curves. The cervical curve develops as the infant begins to hold up the head, and the lumbar curve appears with standing and walking.

A typical vertebra consists of an enlarged anterior portion called the body, which provides weight-bearing support. Attached posteriorly to the body is a vertebral arch, which surrounds and defines the vertebral foramen for passage of the spinal cord. The vertebral arch consists of the pedicles, which attach to the vertebral body, and the laminae, which come together to form the roof of the arch. Arising from the vertebral arch are the laterally projecting transverse processes and the posteriorly oriented spinous process. The superior articular processes project upward, where they articulate with the downward projecting inferior articular processes of the next higher vertebrae.

A typical cervical vertebra has a small body, a bifid (Y-shaped) spinous process, and U-shaped transverse processes with a transverse foramen. In addition to these characteristics, the axis (C2 vertebra) also has the dens projecting upward from the vertebral body. The atlas (C1 vertebra) differs from the other cervical vertebrae in that it does not have a body, but instead consists of bony ring formed by the anterior and posterior arches. The atlas articulates with the dens from the axis. A typical thoracic vertebra is distinguished by its long, downward projecting spinous process. Thoracic vertebrae also have articulation facets on the body and transverse processes for attachment of the ribs. Lumbar vertebrae support the greatest amount of body weight and thus have a large, thick body. They also have a short, blunt spinous process. The sacrum is triangular in shape. The median sacral crest is formed by the fused vertebral spinous processes and the lateral sacral crest is derived from the fused transverse processes. Anterior (ventral) and posterior (dorsal) sacral foramina allow branches of the sacral spinal nerves to exit the sacrum. The auricular surfaces are articulation sites on the lateral sacrum that anchor the sacrum to the hipbones to form the pelvis. The coccyx is small and derived from the fusion of four small vertebrae.

The intervertebral discs fill in the gaps between the bodies of adjacent vertebrae. They provide strong attachments and padding between the vertebrae. The outer, fibrous layer of a disc is called the anulus fibrosus. The gel-like interior is called the nucleus pulposus. The disc can change shape to allow for movement between vertebrae. If the anulus fibrosus is weakened or damaged, the nucleus pulposus can protrude outward, resulting in a herniated disc.

The anterior longitudinal ligament runs along the full length of the anterior vertebral column, uniting the vertebral bodies. The supraspinous ligament is located posteriorly and interconnects the spinous processes of the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae. In the neck, this ligament expands to become the nuchal ligament. The nuchal ligament is attached to the cervical spinous processes and superiorly to the base of the skull, out to the external occipital protuberance. The posterior longitudinal ligament runs within the vertebral canal and unites the posterior sides of the vertebral bodies. The ligamentum flavum unites the lamina of adjacent vertebrae. The thoracic cage protects the heart and lungs. It is composed of 12 pairs of ribs with their costal cartilages and the sternum. The ribs are anchored posteriorly to the 12 thoracic vertebrae.

The sternum consists of the manubrium, body, and xiphoid process. The manubrium and body are joined at the sternal angle, which is also the site for attachment of the second ribs. Ribs are flattened, curved bones and are numbered 1–12. Posteriorly, the head of the rib articulates with the costal facets located on the bodies of thoracic vertebrae and the rib tubercle articulates with the facet located on the vertebral transverse process. The angle of the ribs forms the most posterior portion of the thoracic cage. The costal groove in the inferior margin of each rib carries blood vessels and a nerve. Anteriorly, each rib ends in a costal cartilage. True ribs (1–7) attach directly to the sternum via their costal cartilage. The false ribs (8–12) either attach to the sternum indirectly or not at all. Ribs 8–10 have their costal cartilages attached to the cartilage of the next higher rib. The floating ribs (11–12) are short and do not attach to the sternum or to another rib.

Review questions

1. Define the parts and functions of the thoracic cage.
2. How may vertebral osteoporosis contribute to kyphosis?
3. Describe the structure and function of an intervertebral disc.
4. Describe the vertebral column and define each region.

Basic literature:

1. Saladin, Kenneth S: Essentials of Anatomy & Physiology. (2018, McGraw-Hill Education)
2. Costanzo, Linda S.: BRS Physiology. Board Review Series. 7th edition. - Wolters Kluwer Health, 2018. - 307p. - ISBN 1496367693, 9781496367693
3. Leslie P. Gartner: Color Atlas and Text of Histology. - 7th Edition. - Wolters Kluwer, 2017. ISBN 1496346734, 9781496346735
4. Russell K. Hobbie, Bradley J. Roth: Intermediate Physics for Medicine and Biology. - Springer, 2015. - ISBN 3319126822, 9783319126821
5. Andersson D, Medical Terminology: The Best and Most Effective Way to Memorize, Pronounce and Understand Medical Terms: Second Edition, ISBN-13 : 978-1519066626, 2016