

Anatomy of The Spine

Vertebrae

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The main supportive element of each vertebra is cylindrical in shape with flat surfaces on the top and the bottom. This is referred to as the vertebral body. There is a thin layer of cartilage, which lies over the bone along the flat surface the top and the bottom of the vertebral body. This referred to the vertebral endplate. The intervertebral disc lies against these surfaces.

Behind the vertebral body, there is a large central opening. Multiple vertebrae are stacked upon one another with the central openings aligned to form the central spinal canal. This canal contains the spinal cord in the cervical and thoracic areas and descending spinal nerve roots in the lumbar spine. . The central spinal canal accommodates blood vessels, the spinal cord and spinal nerve roots.

The bony aspect of the vertebrae posterior to the spinal canal is like the roof of a house. The elements of the bony arch, which lie over the posterior aspect of the spinal canal, are referred to as the lamina. Where the lamina join together there is a bony extension called the spinous process. Each spinous process projects backwards and down and are felt as bumps when you feel your spine. There is also a bony projection off of each side of the vertebrae referred to as the transverse process.