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dictionary

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English  
Language

  


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**de·gen·er·ate**  (dĭ-jĕn ər-ĭt)

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*adj.*

1. Having declined, as in function or nature, from a former or original state: *a degenerate form of an ancient folk art.*
2. Morally corrupt or given to vice.
3. *Physics* Relating to two or more quantum states that share the same quantum numbers: *degenerate energy levels.*
4. *Physics* Characterized by great density and consisting of atoms stripped of electrons: *degenerate matter.*
5. *Medicine* Characterized by degeneration, as of tissue, a cell, or an organ.
6. *Biology* Having lost one or more highly developed functions, characteristics, or structures through evolution: *a degenerate life form.*
7. *Genetics* Relating to or being a gene that has multiple codons for the same amino acid.

*n.*

A depraved or corrupt person.

*intr.v.* (-ə-rāt') **de·gen·er·at·ed**, **de·gen·er·at·ing**, **de·gen·er·ates**

1. To fall below a normal or desirable state, especially functionally or morally; deteriorate: *old water pipes that are degenerating with age; a dispute that degenerated into a brawl.*
2. To decline in quality: *The quality of his writing degenerated as he continued to drink.*
3. To undergo degeneration.

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[Latin *dēgenerātus*, past participle of *dēgenerāre*, to depart from one's own kind, deteriorate : *dē-*, *de-* + *genus*, *gener-*, race; see **gena-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

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**de·gen er·ate·ly** *adv.*

**de·gen er·ate·ness** *n.*

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Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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