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Spine Surgeon's Guide to Avoiding Back Surgery

By Dr. David Hanscom



A few years ago, a friend told me about a problem he'd been having with his back – pain and numbness down the side of his leg. His doctor had ordered an MRI, which revealed a bone spur between the fifth lumbar and first sacral vertebra, as it exited out of the side of the spine. The spur caused a compression of the fifth lumbar nerve root.

Making Matters Worse ...

Surgery might help, I told him, but I thought he could free himself of pain and avoid surgery with some exercises that would flex his spine. I also suggested using research-validated Mind-Body Syndrome principles that would help by calming down his nervous system, which was on fire with all the pain he'd been experiencing.

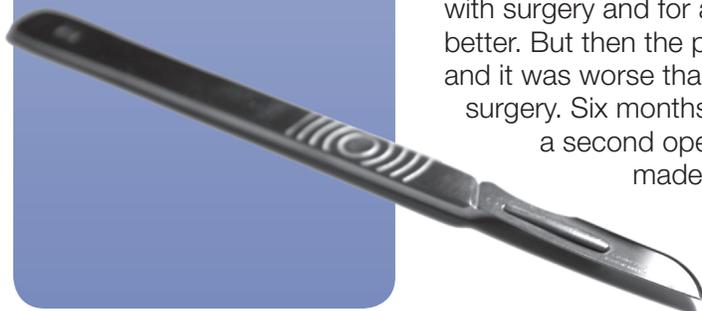
My friend decided to go ahead with surgery and for a while he felt better. But then the pain returned, and it was worse than before the surgery. Six months later, he had a second operation, which made his pain even worse. (I didn't see

him at all during this period as his life had pretty much stopped.) Understandably angry after all this, my friend decided he was fed up with the medical system. He fired everyone and stopped all his medications. He opted to see what happened if he just did nothing and waited for his pain to go away. Interestingly, within a week of making this decision, it did.

Around this time, I ran into him at a social gathering. Having shared all of this, he asked me what I thought he should do. I told him he'd already done it – he needed to take complete charge of his own care, and he had. He was only asking me what he should do next.

He brought me the MRI scan that had been done after his second operation and I was surprised to see that the original problem was still there. The bone spur that needed to be removed was not in the middle of the spinal canal, where the surgeon had operated, but out to its side. The surgeon had missed it; working on the middle part of my friend's spine, he'd freed up the first sacral nerve root, not the L5 nerve root. (This happens more often than you

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ISSN 1947-4814

Layout/Design by Summer Bonne

Live Pain Free® is published monthly
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Healthy Back Institute®

141 E. Mercer Street, Suite E
Dripping Springs, TX 78620
Phone (800) 216-4908
Email editor@livepainfree.com

might guess.) But, even so, my friend felt better, because the surgery wasn't the solution to alleviate his pain.

Surgery Isn't Always the Wrong Decision ...

Another patient I treated around the same time had pain down both of her legs, also in the pattern of the L5 nerve root. I'd prescribed the same "structured approach" to treatment as I'd suggested for my friend – exercises to increase her flexibility plus calming down her nervous system utilizing mind-body techniques. But, since she knew she had significant bone spurs touching both of the L5 nerve roots, she decided she wanted me to free them up surgically. So we scheduled her procedure.

But in this case, she was a patient and not a friend. I require all my surgical patients to engage in this structured approach, which I call the DOCC (Defined, Organized, Comprehensive Care)

project. It's a self-directed program

anyone can do that systematically addresses all of the variables affecting chronic pain. Interestingly, when this patient came in two months later for her pre-operative visit, her leg symptoms had disappeared. We cancelled her surgery.

I'm not saying surgery is always a bad idea; it's not. I'm a spine surgeon and find it gratifying to successfully perform a surgical procedure on a person who has a clear, specific and visible problem (as both of these patients did) and free them from terrible pain. If my patient's legs still hurt, she would have obtained relief from the surgery. If my friend's operation had been done correctly, his pain would have disappeared. But since the bone spur never got removed, it's clear he didn't need the procedure to become pain-free. And isn't it better – less costly, safer, less painful and even more reliably effective – to be able to get rid of pain without an operation?

"My back was just destroyed after pregnancy. I almost had to have surgery, until I did Pilates and rebuilt my body."

–Melissa McCarthy

How to Take Control Over Chronic Pain

The key to overcoming chronic pain is taking full responsibility for your pain and for your own care and healing from it. I've never seen a patient recover from chronic pain who hasn't done this.

Why? After all, one doesn't have to "take responsibility" for fusing a broken bone or making a bruise disappear – and yes, the body does have the potential to heal itself. Sometimes, however, things go awry and that's what happens with chronic pain. Your brain and entire nervous system become so accustomed to pain that the well-traveled pathways of those nerve signals become a permanent, well-worn trail, like one that kids make from the back door to the swing set.

With chronic pain, the signals keep coming, over and over – the key to healing is to calm it down. There are multiple reasons why the

structured approach to treating chronic pain (back pain or pain elsewhere in the body and mind) is so effective, but one key factor is that taking control decreases anxiety. Calming down your nervous system makes you less sensitive and raises your threshold for pain. The pain signals continue to fire impulses, but they remain below the elevated pain threshold so they no longer hurt. While my friend and patient both still had bone spurs, they no longer experienced them as painful. It's not that the pain diminished; it disappeared altogether.

Here's The Advice!

If you think or are told that you need back surgery, please understand that it is critical to make a thoughtful decision. The risks and potential downside of any spine surgery (indeed, any surgery) are significant.

Consider the following when considering elective spine surgery.

- Do not make a surgical decision at your first visit.
- Only consider surgery as a possible solution for leg or arm pain if there is a clear and visible cause (revealed by imaging) that matches the pain (it hurts in the way it should from that particular injury or deformity). Also, know that back pain associated with disc degeneration rarely responds to surgery on long-term follow-up.
- Take control over your health and well-being before your surgery to enable your body to recover afterward, and so that the pain will get better, not worse, as a result of the procedure.

Whether or not you have surgery, if you are experiencing back pain (or any other kind of pain), I urge you to take charge of your own recovery.

Not only might it solve your problem altogether, but doing so will also improve your life. Briefly, here are the essential components of my DOCC program (which is outlined in my book, "Back in Control"):

- Educate yourself about your pain – not only the injury that caused it, but also understand the nature of pain so you can take charge of your own care.
- Sleep. You should get seven to eight hours of sleep a night for at least three months. Lack of sleep adversely affects your perception of pain, while also impairing your judgment.
- Manage anxiety and stress – this is especially true if you don't think you have any. Your anxiety should be actively assessed and treated. Chronic pain always induces frustration; if you aren't feeling it, it's just that you are not allowing yourself to do so.
- Stabilize your use of pain medications. High-dose narcotics mask pain by altering the nervous system. The net result is that they actually increase your sensitivity to pain.

By the way, both people in the stories I described above are still doing well over three years later.

Dr. David Hanscom is the top orthopedic spine surgeon in Seattle. His unusual message for people with back pain is that spine surgery should only be done as a last resort – and most back operations should never have been done. Dr. Hanscom has developed a structured approach to treating chronic pain that has helped hundreds of patients become pain-free with and without surgery. He is the author of "Back in Control: A spine surgeon's roadmap out of chronic pain."

I Cancelled Surgery Thanks to This One Simple Tip

By Jesse Cannone, CFT, CPRS, MFT

I'll never forget the day I was lying on the grocery store floor writhing in pain. I couldn't even stand up, much less walk out of the store.

Worse, it happened in front of the attractive young lady I was trying to impress. Right in the middle of our third date.



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I had met Maria at the gym where I worked as a personal fitness trainer. After asking her on a date she invited me out for a run. Running? Sure I could do that.

Only there was a little problem. I was a bodybuilder, not a runner. Heck, I really never ran more than a mile or two at a time. But Maria ran marathons for the fun of it.

Still, I was young, in shape, and too macho to back down. I accepted her invitation and joined her for a four-mile run. No sweat.

Since our first run went so well, we doubled the distance to eight miles for our second date. A little more challenging, but I kept up. And our budding romance continued to bloom.

Then came the big run – 12 full miles. Nearly a half marathon.

My tongue may have been hanging out but no way was I letting up now. After what seemed like forever the run finally reached its end. Yes, I made it – ego intact!

That's when we went to the grocery store. And right in the middle of a great conversation my knee suddenly buckled and there I was on the floor. So much for impressive.

Lots of Wrong Advice

I figured I must have injured myself with all the running. But after several weeks of pain my knee still wasn't better.

I visited a doctor. Then another. Chiropractors. Orthopedic surgeons.

Multiple x-rays showed healthy bones. My MRI came back normal.

Yet the prescribed routine of cortisone shots and painkillers simply didn't give any lasting relief.

“Let's just clean things out”

Despite clean x-rays and a clean MRI, the orthopedic surgeon eventually suggested surgery to “clean up” some of the debris in the joint fluid.

Although others with similar levels of debris had no pain, I had tried everything I could think of and still couldn't walk normally. Desperate, I scheduled the surgery.

A few days before surgery I attended a continuing education seminar on fitness rehabilitation to expand my skills as a personal trainer. One of the presenters was a knee expert, so I sought him out after his talk.

Imagine my surprise when, after observing how I stood and walked, he looked at me and said, “You don't have a knee problem at all.”

Intrigued, I asked him to continue.

“The muscles on the left and right sides of your body are not in balance,” he explained. “One side is much tighter than the other, and it's shifting most of your body weight to the left. That's why your left knee is bothering you. It's carrying most of your weight.”

Rather than walking normally on both legs, I was basically hopping along on just one. That made sense. But it was what he told me next that changed my life ... and might change yours.

Eliminate the Hidden Cause of Pain

Before that day I had never heard of such a thing as muscles being out of balance. But he not only explained the problem to me, he showed me how to overcome it.

“Here, let me show you a stretch you can use to even out the difference in muscle flexibility between the left and right sides of your body. Try it.”

I felt some relief within minutes. I continued using the same stretch a few times a day, every day, and in three days my pain was 80% percent gone. I was walking normally without pain within a week.

Of course, I canceled my surgery.

To my surprise, the stretches not only ended my knee pain, it also helped me with scoliosis and

back pain I had dealt with for years. You see, the problem was never really my knee, back or even scoliosis.

It was a muscle imbalance problem.

Before You Schedule Surgery

Look, surgery – **any surgery** – should always be a last resort. And your doctor had better be able to clearly explain and show why the surgery is needed, exactly how it will help and what the odds are for success based on similar cases.

While some physical problems may require corrective surgery, the vast majority of the time surgery for many forms of chronic pain not only is unnecessary – it can make your pain worse.

My story of ending pain by correcting the balance of strength and flexibility in my imbalanced muscles is far from unique. I've helped well over 64,000 people end back pain, neck pain, shoulder pain, sciatica pain, knee pain and more all simply by helping them identify their specific muscle imbalances and using targeted stretching

and strengthening exercises to restore the balance.

On your Live Pain Free® member website you'll find a video I created demonstrating what muscle imbalances are, explaining how they cause pain and how to correct them. If you're considering surgery for chronic pain, I urge you to watch that video first.

Oh, and the attractive young lady? She married me and today Maria and I have eight children in our happy family.

Watch the Video!

Watch my video on muscle imbalances on your Live Pain Free® member website:

losethebackpain.customerhub.net



Healthy Eating Doesn't Have to Break the Bank

By Steve Hefferon, CMT, PTA

You already know what you eat has a major impact on your health. But if you're the grocery shopper in your family, you also recognize eating healthy doesn't come cheap.

Yes, it's an investment. An important one. But if

your budget is limited you may not have the option of buying strictly organic, non-GMO foods.

So if you're trying to stretch those grocery dollars to eat healthier, use this healthy shopping guide to help prioritize your healthy shopping list.

Meat

Certified organic meats are best, but expensive. As a less expensive alternative, look for meat labeled antibiotic-free.

Antibiotics are used in factory farms where animals are crammed together in unsanitary living conditions until slaughter. You're more likely to get meat from a naturally healthier animal and avoiding ingesting unnecessary antibiotics when you buy antibiotic-free.

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Dairy

Raw, organic milk (if you can buy raw milk where you live) is best. Organic milk is still much better than hormone-laden commercial brands. But if you can't splurge for certified organic milk at least look for hormone-free milk.

Despite the FDA-enforced label that there is no difference between milk from cows treated with rBST hormones and those which have not, a number of studies indicate the added hormones adversely affect development during puberty and increase risk of hormone-dependent prostate, testes and breast cancers.

Produce

When it comes to buying healthier produce, the big issues to watch for are GMOs and pesticides. Since virtually all corn, soy and canola sold today are GMO-based, one of the simplest ways to eat healthier produce is to avoid these three altogether – just be sure to check product labels.

Avoiding the worst pesticide-laden produce is easier due to the annual Dirty Dozen™ report by the Environmental Working Group. Their 2014 report lists these worst offenders when it comes to pesticides – so buy these organic if at all possible:

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1. Apples | 7. Sweet bell peppers |
| 2. Strawberries | 8. Imported nectarines |
| 3. Grapes | 9. Cucumbers |
| 4. Celery | 10. Cherry tomatoes |
| 5. Peaches | 11. Imported snap peas |
| 6. Spinach | 12. Potatoes |



Prepared Foods

You're almost always better off cooking from scratch. But if you must buy boxed, canned or other prepared foods, carefully check the labels to avoid these health killers:

- Artificial colors, flavors or preservatives
- Artificial sweeteners like aspartame and sucralose
- MSG / Monosodium glutamate
- HFCS / High fructose corn syrup

Water

You're probably paying for your water one way or another already. One of the most cost-effective household investments you can make in your health is a good water filtration system.

Look for a system that will remove chlorine, fluoride and other dangerous chemicals from your drinking and cooking water. Use a filter for your showerhead to remove these chemicals from your water as many will absorb through your skin as well.



Chiropractic – Beyond Back Pain

By Dr. Jenny L. Bruck, D.C., Vitality Expert

I had finally put the finishing touches on my health workshop for a convention in Vancouver. I was shutting my laptop down and blissfully anticipating a short nap before the plane landed.

As my eyelids were finally getting heavy, the jolly man next to me asked what I did for a



living. “I’m lucky I haven’t needed a chiropractor,” he proudly boasted. “I haven’t had back pain in years!” I paused for a moment, knowing I had to make a decision. I could either smile and congratulate him or take a deep breath and do what I’ve done so many times before: educate about what chiropractors **really** do. I somewhat reluctantly chose the latter.

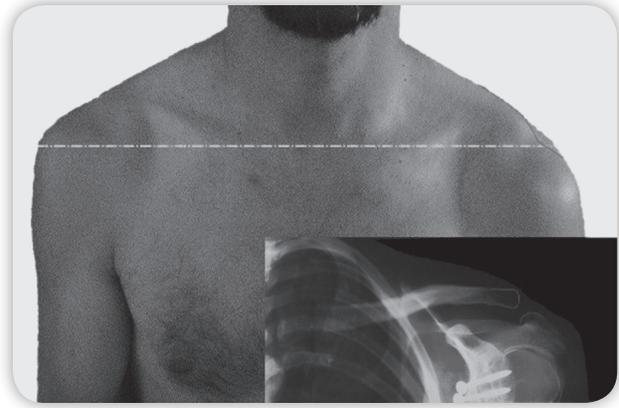
Helping to change the public’s paradigm of chiropractic healthcare is a necessary component of my profession. Symptoms or pain are only signs of imbalance. Correcting the imbalance, and not just the symptoms or pain, is a key to optimal health. Only getting spinal healthcare when you have back pain is like only cleaning your teeth when you have a toothache. The true benefit of chiropractic care comes with regular wellness check-ups and adjustments as necessary.

Steven*, a 59-year-old male, came to my office a few months ago with a limp, a “tired feeling all the time,” high blood pressure, decreased breathing capacity since high school, and inability to sleep well due to back pain. In addition, he appeared irritable and anxious. I examined his spine and nervous system and found distinct areas of spinal imbalance. Chiropractors refer to this imbalance as subluxation.

By definition, subluxation is spinal misalignment causing potential injury to the nerve system. The central nerve system is protected by the skull and spinal column. Any misalignment or lack of proper motion may stretch the spinal cord five to seven centimeters (as reported by leading neurosurgeon Alfred Brieg) and even small pressures on the nerve can cause organ dysfunction (1).

Subluxation can be caused by injuries such as car accidents or sports (like golf) and from repetitive motions like poor sleeping positions, sitting all day or excessive computer work. Unfortunately, pain is not always present with subluxation since only 10% of the nerve system can perceive pain. Organ dysfunction can also occur without any symptoms.

Corrective chiropractic aims to restore normal motion and position to the spine by using low force spinal adjustments. Reduction of pain



or discomfort can often happen even after a few adjustments, but stabilizing the spine and stopping degeneration or arthritis takes time and frequency of adjustments. In essence, our objective for working on the spine is to affect the function of the nervous system and slow down or stop spinal degeneration.

Steven’s initial postural analysis showed uneven shoulders by 1-½ inches on the left and uneven hips at ¼ inch on the right. Dual weight scales showed an imbalance of 28 pounds to the left. Posture is the window to the spine, so postural imbalance suggests spinal imbalance. Dr. Hans Seyle, a Nobel Laureate, states that “the beginning of the disease process starts with postural distortion.” The rest of the initial examination showed a severe subluxation of the first vertebrae in his neck with a dramatic loss of the healthy normal neck curve. This meant that the spinal cord inside the spine was likely being stretched and compressed. Due to the location of his spinal subluxation, we determined involvement in the sympathetic nerve system, which controls immune function, blood supply to the brain and reaction to stress.

After 90 days, re-examination results showed a 30% restoration of normal neck alignment and increased mobility in the spinal column. When asked to write down how he felt since under chiropractic corrective care, Steven wrote, “My irritability has also been dropping off. My energy has gone up. I’m walking without a limp for the first time in a decade; I’m breathing clearly for the first time in a long time, and most impressively my medical doctor took me off my blood pressure medication (my blood pressure is now “normal”) and I have started to read for short periods

“My energy has gone up. I’m walking without a limp for the first time in a decade...”

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without needing my eyeglasses (I have used glasses for twenty one years.)”

It’s important to note that no special adjustments were done for a limp, irritability, energy, breathing, blood pressure or eyesight. Steven’s body was displaying its innate healing powers once his nerve interference was lessened. Nothing was added or taken away from his body. We often tell patients, “we are not the doctors, you are. We are trained to remove the interference that is not allowing your body to fully express itself.”

Each patient’s experience in our office is different in terms of healing. We primarily focus on specific and gentle spinal adjustments done by hand. However, many factors go into a patient’s healing success such as commitment to care recommendations, nutrition, exercise, sleep strategies and spiritual health. Addressing each area is a significant part of a patient achieving optimal health. Providing literature, workshops and accountability are key components in how we contribute.

I believe that more important than a patient receiving an adjustment is the understanding of why they are receiving the adjustment. Regular chiropractic care, along with healthy lifestyle choices, gives the body the best chance to function and heal well, preventing problems and maximizing health. As for the man on the plane, his name was Greg and he now has biweekly wellness adjustments with a fantastic chiropractor I found for him in New Jersey.

*Name has been changed.

(1) The Effects of Mild Compression on Spinal Nerve Roots with Implications for Models of Vertebral Subluxation and the Clinical Effects of Chiropractic Adjustment

R. Scott Alderson, D.C Bio, George J. Muhs, D.C., DABCN, CCN Bio

[May, 2001 Vol 4, No. 2, p 1-13]

Dr. Jenny Bruck is in private practice and travels the country as a professional speaker. She hosts a popular podcast called “For the Health of It” and her new book, “52 Vitality Tools,” is being published later this year. Dr. Bruck has also served on faculty at Life University in Atlanta where she taught patient education to upper-level graduate students. For more information go to www.spinalcorrectivecenter.com.

“I Sleep Much Deeper Than Ever Before”

“You supply some very helpful information – some of which I already knew, but more that is new to me and even more helpful. Thank you for your generosity. In addition to everything you have taught me, I sleep almost every night on the jade far infrared mat and I credit it with keeping me from waking up with stiffness and pain. My back has stayed pain free, with less stretching required of me, as long as I sleep on the mat every night for at least 3-4 hours. It is so comforting and relaxing and I feel like I sleep much deeper than ever before. Thank you for carrying such a great product.”

Kay Bird

Coming Next Month!

Professional athletes from around the world fly in to get help from next month’s special guest to help them recover from injuries and boost their performance. But the technique he’ll share can help you overcome virtually any chronic joint or muscle pain. Don’t miss next month’s special feature!