

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Spinal Decompression Without Surgery. Don't Be Fooled

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Conservative (nonsurgical) treatment of back pain should always be the first consideration. At least, it is in my office. I was trained at the Cleveland Clinic to never walk into an exam room wondering "What surgery can I do on this patient".

To put it another way, to some doctors if you have a hammer (surgery) everything looks like a nail. That is the wrong approach, always was, always will be.

Spinal Stenosis

I have done back surgery for many years. As time has passed I do less back surgery while many of my colleagues are doing more and more. Why am I doing less? Because hardly a day in the office goes by that I don't see a patient who has had 4 or 5 back operations elsewhere and they are not any better.

Does anybody out there know someone who has had 4 - 5 back surgeries who is fine?

Nonsurgical Decompression

I believe that the failure of so many back surgeries is giving spinal surgery a bad name.

This has created techniques that claim to decompress the spine by use of a motorized traction device or therapeutic table.

Chiropractors and physical therapists have used traction on the lower back for decades with improvement in some cases. For a short time it might be worth a shot.

Nothing New

The new or revolutionary nonsurgical spinal decompression devices are essentially the same as the older devices with some mechanical alteration or addition like a computerized feedback system.

Very Expensive

In some clinics that use it, it is done 20 - 28 times over 4 - 5 weeks. It can cost \$50 to \$100 per treatment. I don't think Medicare covers it nor do most insurances. Some might, but anyone starting the technique would be well advised to check it out to be sure the technique is covered.

What Are The Claims?

A controlled force on the lower back creates a negative pressure in the disc creating a vacuum that draws the bulging disc material back into the disc reducing pressure on the nerve and spinal cord.

Uh, maybe, but the back is an impossibly complicated structure of bones, little joints, discs, ligaments, nerves and muscles. Often it is next to impossible to pinpoint exactly where the back pain is actually coming from.

Not FDA Approved

Advertising often states that the treatment is approved by the FDA. This is not true. Also don't be fooled by the term FDA "cleared" which means its use is allowed because it is similar to an older existing product. But it is not new or revolutionary.

Surgery

Sometimes the pressure on the nerve or nerves from a bulging disc or spinal stenosis is such that surgical decompression is the only way to relieve the pain. I know when to do surgery and when not to do it in these cases.

Many Options

Lower back pain treatment is a complicated subject which I am not trying to cover here except to point out there is "nothing new under the sun". Unless you are guaranteed to get your money back if you are not satisfied (not going to happen), I would be very careful about expensive automated motorized traction.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Archive

For a tremendous amount of musculoskeletal and Orthopaedic surgery information check out the office website www.orthopodsurgeon.com which also takes you to Your Orthopaedic Connection. It contains a huge amount of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information.

In addition, the website has the archive of every article I have written for you in Shepherd Argus. All the articles are listed from most recent back to the first one! Check it out for interesting articles you may have missed.

I appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients, present and future and welcome all newcomers!

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush