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ILLINOIS BONE AND JOINT INSTITUTE
Libertyville/Lake Forest



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Find the Cause of Your Back Pain

Finding the root medical condition causing your back pain is important. Only then can the pain be treated effectively. IBJI Libertyville/Lake Forest physicians can use the latest diagnostic insights and technologies to find the root cause of your pain and suggest the proper treatments. Causes of back pain include the following:

Injuries. Ligament sprains – often caused by lifting or twisting improperly – or fractured vertebrae can cause short- or long-term pain. As people age, a condition called *osteoporosis* weakens bones and can cause vertebrae to fracture. Accidents or falls may also cause back injuries.

Mechanical or structural problems.

A structural problem with your spine can cause pain when you move in a certain way. One common condition of this nature is *degenerative disc disease*, which causes the discs located between the vertebrae to break down and lose their cushioning ability as they age. Other mechanical causes of back pain include herniated or ruptured discs, muscle tension and spasms.

Medical conditions and diseases.

Various medical conditions can cause painful inflammation or place pressure on the spinal cord and nerves. These include *arthritis*, *scoliosis* (curvature of the spine),

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Success story — Ronald C. Walters

After pain medications and epidural injections failed to provide a lasting solution for back pain caused by spinal stenosis, Ronald C. Walters chose to have IBJI's Dr. Stanford Tack perform a lumbar laminectomy with spinal fusion. When he awoke after surgery, Walters remembers immediately noticing that the pain was gone. "It was like somebody turned a switch" he recalls. A few weeks later, he was walking without a walker. ("People couldn't believe it," that he was walking so well so soon,) says Walters, who was 73 at the time of the surgery. "Walking was excruciatingly painful . . . it was terrible," he says. "Now, my back is pain-free."



Find the Cause of Your Back Pain (*continued*)

spondylolisthesis (slipped disc), and *spinal stenosis* (narrowing of the spinal column). Other conditions not directly related to the spine can cause back pain. These include kidney stones or infections, pregnancy, endometriosis, and fibromyalgia.

Infections and tumors. Infections and benign and malignant tumors involving the spine are less common causes of back pain. These conditions can irritate nerve endings or put pressure on the spine, resulting in pain.

Success story — Mary Lovgren

Mary Lovgren tried chiropractic, physical therapy, aquatherapy and swimming, and epidural injections, but nothing helped her back pain. She could not stand or walk for more than 5 or 10 minutes at a time. Now, just three months after surgery, she can be on her feet for up to an hour with no pain, thanks to a successful lumbar laminectomy with spinal fusion performed by IBJI's Dr. Stanford Tack. Lovgren was especially impressed with Dr. Tack's listening, compassion and people skills. "On Super Bowl Sunday, he came to my hospital room two or three times just to see how things were going," she recalls. Lovgren is looking forward to visiting a zoo, going to flea markets, shopping at a mall and just going for a walk – activities she hasn't enjoyed since before having back pain problems.

Is Surgery the Answer – or Not?

Depending on your personal situation, back pain can be solved using treatments ranging from rest to spine surgery.

Before beginning any treatment, IBJI Libertyville/Lake Forest physicians conduct appropriate tests to determine the root cause of your pain.

These tests may include range of motion and nerve function exams to find the area of discomfort; blood and urine tests for infection or other medical problems; and

x-rays, CT (computed tomography) or MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scans to view bones or connective tissue. Electromyogram (EMG) may be used to determine if there is nerve or muscle damage.

Once the cause of your pain is found, IBJI physicians consider all non-surgical treatments (including rest, ice or heat applications, medications and physical therapy) before recommending surgery.

Success story — Don Schaal

The owner of a welding shop, Don Schaal says he's "a mechanical type of guy." So it only made sense for him to seek a way to fix mechanically the sometimes-paralyzing back pain caused by his degenerative disc disease. He asked a friend who was a surgical nurse for a recommendation, and Dr. Burt Schell's name came up immediately.

The solution Dr. Schell recommended was a surgical procedure called transforminal lumbar interbody fusion (TLIF). Dr. Schell removed Schaal's degenerated disc from between two vertebrae and then fused the vertebrae together, using a bone graft, a cage device, pedicle screws and rods. The bone graft material and cage device serve as a scaffold for new bone growth while helping to achieve normal height between the vertebrae and taking pressure off the nerve roots. The screws and rods stabilize the spine while the treated area heals.

Six weeks after the TLIF procedure, Schaal, 50, says he feels no pain. "I took a week off after the surgery, but by the end of the week I was doing paperwork and taking calls," he says, adding that he has been exercising three times a week. "I was expecting the recovery time to be a lot worse than it is. I'm really happy with the results. They did a great job."

Effective Surgical Approaches Relieve Spine-Related Pain

While many patients do not require surgery to relieve back pain, those choosing an IBJ Libertyville/Lake Forest surgeon benefit from effective approaches that can greatly improve outcomes and reduce recovery time.

For disc herniations

Disc herniations located in the lower or "lumbar" section of the spine can be removed through an outpatient procedure called *lumbar microdiscectomy*. Using microscopic techniques, IBJ spine surgeons work through a one-inch incision to perform this procedure, which usually takes only about 45 minutes and dramatically relieves pain along the sciatic nerve located in the lower back.

Many patients can begin a low-impact aerobic conditioning program the day after surgery and return to non-physical work activity soon after. Most patients return to normal physical activities within six weeks. IBJ spine surgeons have performed hundreds of lumbar microdiscectomies over the past 15 years with a success rate meeting or exceeding national standards of excellence.

For spinal stenosis

Spinal stenosis causes bone and soft tissue overgrowth that narrows the spinal column and places pressure on nerve roots and the spinal cord, causing pain. IBJ spine surgeons commonly perform a procedure called *lumbar laminectomy* to remove the overgrowth, re-expand the spinal column, and relieve pain and cramping in the lower back and legs. Laminectomy usually take between one and three hours to perform. Hospital stays often range from two to four days, and patients resume normal daily activities within six to eight weeks.

For spinal stenosis patients also diagnosed with slipped discs, or spondylolisthesis, IBJ spine surgeons perform *lumbar spinal fusion* to add stability to the surgically repaired segment. Lumbar spinal fusion may be recommended also for patients with chronic back pain due to disc degeneration.

IBJ physicians are reviewing the effectiveness of using synthetic substances rather than bone grafts during fusion procedures,

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Effective Surgical Approaches Relieve Spine-Related Pain *(continued)*

eliminating the pain and possible complications caused by harvesting bone from another part of the patient's body. In addition, artificial disk replacement surgery is being reviewed as an alternative to spinal fusion surgery.

For neck pain

IBJI spine surgeons perform *anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF)* to treat neck pain caused by either disc herniations or spinal stenosis. An alternative to ACDF is *cervical disc arthroplasty or disc replacement*. FDA studies suggest that this procedure can provide equivalent results to ACDF in the short to intermediate term with the potential benefit of the patient maintaining normal neck mobility.

Learn more about spine surgery

For detailed information about various aspects of spine surgery, go to:
www.understandingspinesurgery.com



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