



**SOUTHEASTERN SPINE INSTITUTE**

presents

# *Back Surgery 101*

**An eBook for Patients**

# *Back Surgery 101*

Presented by the SOUTHEASTERN SPINE INSTITUTE

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## Chapter 1

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### *A Brief History of Back Surgery*

Rapid changes in back surgery techniques continue to improve safety and shorten recovery. Spinal surgery and neurosurgery were only in the infant stages in 1950; surgeons weren't even sure what caused most back pain. In general, medical science and research have enhanced surgical procedures drastically since then. Back surgery in particular has seen dramatic shifts in both availability and effectiveness.



In the early years, about the only back surgery being performed in the country required large posterior incisions that cut through muscle and tissue to get to what was thought to be the affected areas causing back pain. Many of the advances in back surgery in the 1950s came about primarily from the front lines of the Korean War.

### *Technology in the 60s and 70s*

While NASA was putting a man on the moon in the 1960s, space-age technology also benefitted the medical community. During this time, scientists developed the CT scanner and operating room microscopes. Medical science in that decade discovered bone morphogenic proteins: chemicals that cause bones to fuse. Back surgeons in the 60s saw the introduction of lumbar fusion implants, using metal rods and other techniques designed to treat herniation in thoracic discs.

Neuroimaging came into its own in the 1970s with the full use of the CT scanner and the development of the MRI, otherwise known as magnetic imaging resonance x-ray technology. Back surgeons performed more minimally invasive surgeries during this period, and cervical vertebra fusion techniques became more commonplace. The Congress of Neurological Surgeons formed in 1979 to promote best practices.

### *Back Surgery Breakthroughs*

Spinal surgeons truly began to understand the spine in all its intricacies during the 1980s, as technology continued to offer additional insight into the workings of the spine and the role of back surgery. Instrumentation was refined and a number of screws and artificial bones for grafting were developed during this decade.

Understanding the relationship of the brain to the spine deepened during the 1990s. Technology continued to bring advances to the field of back surgery and non-invasive back pain treatment. Spine doctors and medical researchers began to question the veracity of many surgeries. They looked more deeply for viable options that could ease patients' pain and shorten the length of back surgery recovery.

### *Spinal Procedures Speeding Along*

Just as the Internet and other new technologies change at lightning speed, so follows medical innovations. Consider the 2014 surgery performed in China that relied on a spinal disc replacement created on a 3D printer. Or the first in-utero spinal repair of a fetus with spina bifida in a Texas hospital that same year.

Minimally invasive microsurgery performed through tiny incisions has become the norm, and the procedure is getting more sophisticated all the time. As laser technology improves, you'll see more extensive use of the minimally invasive procedures and less major trauma when undergoing back surgery. Rely on your spinal team at the Southeastern Spine Institute to keep up with the latest proven techniques for your ultimate relief.

## Chapter 2

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### *When Back Pain Means Surgery*

If you experience back pain, you may opt to make an appointment with a chiropractor or even a massage therapist. Many times, these modalities can relieve your pain and get you back to your normal routine. If the pain persists, you'll make your way eventually to your primary care physician.





However, none of these practitioners, as skilled and credible as they may be, are experts in spinal medicine. It takes a spine specialist to ask the right questions about your pain and examine you in the right places to find the real cause of your discomfort. And only with an accurate diagnosis can an effective treatment plan be put in place.

### *Diagnosing Back Pain*

Any doctor can prescribe a pain medication or order an MRI, but it takes a specialist — sometimes a whole team of specialists — to get to the cause of your pain. A specialist knows not only what tests to prescribe, but also how to read the results of those tests. Sometimes, an MRI isn't the best choice (or the best first choice) to diagnose your case. Sometimes, an X-ray, fluoroscope, ultrasound or nerve test might better lead to a cause.

At the Southeastern Spine Institute (SSI) in Charleston, SC, your spine physician consults with other specialists — including surgeons, pain management specialists and physical therapists — to get expert opinion and insight into your back pain. Together, they order the tests necessary to make an accurate diagnosis.

### *Don't Get Surgery Unnecessarily*

As it turns out, few back pain cases require surgery. Most respond to other treatment, such as a nerve block or steroid injections. You don't have to undergo surgery if a non-surgical procedure stops your pain and physical therapy helps heal the source of the pain. Even a slipped disc often can be treated without surgery.

Specialists in spinal medicine nearly always proceed slowly, conservatively trying treatments that may ease your back pain while addressing its root cause. If one treatment doesn't work, you can try the next, more invasive procedure. Surgery is always the

last resort, after other treatments have failed. That's not because surgeons don't want to operate, but instead, it's because their primary concern is your health.

### *When You Need Surgery*

Spinal surgeons do not recommend surgery unless your condition has not improved from non-surgical procedures and the surgeons find an anatomical cause for your back pain. In other words, normally your back surgeon will not perform exploratory back surgery. Even minimally invasive surgery is still invasive. Your surgeon requires a specific purpose to do the operation.

Surgery to eliminate low back pain is appropriate if the diagnosis is either:

- A pinched nerve that cannot otherwise be treated (from a tumor or abnormal bone growth, for example)
- An unstable spinal structure due to herniated discs or bone failure

When you have a bone fragment, lesion or impingement on your spinal nerve, your surgeon can operate to remove it, thus freeing your nerve and eliminating the pain you've experienced. But any type of surgery is serious, even endoscopic surgery. A surgeon worth his reputation, like those at SSI, will only operate when absolutely necessary. To get more information, contact the Southeastern Spine Institute today.



## Chapter 3

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# *Effects of Postponing Back Surgery*

**H**ow can you tell if you really need back surgery? Not everyone needs back surgery. The spine specialists at the Southeastern Spine Institute (SSI) understand this very well. In fact, they practice conservative spinal medicine, only resorting to surgery when nothing else works. At the same time, if you are experiencing back, arm or leg pain, you should come in for an examination.

You may find after an exam that you respond well to pain management procedures such as pain medicine, nerve blocks, anti-inflammatories or steroid injections. You may find that a regimen of physical therapy can alleviate your symptoms.

### *Determine the Cause*

Whether or not you need back surgery in Charleston at the Southeastern Spine Institute, you must discover the cause of your pain. The spine specialists will perform a thorough examination and take your medical history. They'll ask about recent injuries and when the pain started. They may have you undergo diagnostic procedures like an MRI.

Once the source of your pain is uncovered, your spine doctor can then make a diagnosis. Only with a diagnosis can a treatment plan be developed. Following a conservative approach, the doctors at SSI will try non-invasive techniques first. Back surgery may not be necessary if these conservative treatments work and continue to work.



### *Weigh the Benefits*

Except in dire circumstances, usually involving an accident or injury, you can afford to wait before undergoing surgery. If you are treating the pain effectively and can resume a normal routine, you don't need to rush into back surgery. A New England Journal of Medicine study found that delaying an operation in most cases does not do more damage.

There are other things to consider before surgery, such as the time you'll need to recover, which can be as long as eight weeks. Back

surgery is something for which you should plan ahead as much as you can. Weigh the benefits of undergoing surgery now versus waiting until your symptoms get worse.

### *Stop Pain at the Source*

Another study, this one by the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, found that patients who did opt for surgery improved significantly. Patients reported a substantial reduction in the amount of pain and a marked improvement in their level of functionality. So surgery in the hands of experts like those at SSI is beneficial, when needed.

Back surgery can eliminate your pain and other symptoms because it fixes the problem at its source. If you have degenerative disc disease, for example, surgery can repair the damage, thus easing your pain. To correct certain conditions, surgery does work.

### *Wait Until You're Sure*

Non-surgical procedures can help, and certainly won't hurt, when you're suffering with back pain. Even SSI medical doctors recommend that you try them first. Except in particularly dire circumstances, delaying back surgery will not make your condition worse.

But when nothing else is effective, prepare yourself for surgery. Eat a balanced diet. Exercise if you can. And set aside four to eight weeks when you will not have to do much physically taxing work. When you're ready, let the spine specialists at the Southeastern Spine Institute be your first choice for back surgery in Charleston.

## Chapter 4

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# *Does Health Insurance Cover Back Surgery?*

Your spine doctors at the Southeastern Spine Institute (SSI) rely on a host of treatment options and less invasive procedures to treat back pain before resorting to surgery. But if surgery is your last resort, the last thing you need to worry about is how to pay for it.



The cost of a typical back surgery can exceed \$100,000, according to Modern Healthcare. That's a huge bill to pay out of pocket. Fortunately, most health insurance policies cover back surgery when it's medically necessary.

Consider not only the surgical costs, but also the medications, magnetic resonance imaging and other tests, rehabilitation and disability. The direct costs can reach as high as \$169,000 for a lumbar fusion and up to \$112,000 for a cervical fusion.

### *Back Surgery Coverage*

Learn how to communicate with your health insurance company about back surgery and other medically necessary treatments. Insurance coverage works more smoothly when the paperwork is done properly. The process is relatively straightforward:

- Your SSI doctor recommends back surgery.
- The billing team at SSI completes the paperwork and submits it to your carrier.
- You receive pre-approval for the procedure.
- You undergo the back surgery.
- The insurance company pays the bill, minus any co-pays and deductibles that are your responsibility.

### *Potential Pitfalls*

Rely on the experienced team at SSI to properly execute the documents required by your insurance carrier. Devote your energy to preparing for your back surgery and pursuing rehab afterward. Before your procedure, the SSI team will alert you to any potential pitfalls, such as:

- Your policy has restrictions that don't cover the surgery.

- The insurance carrier determines the surgery is not medically necessary.
- You've exceeded your annual benefit coverage.
- The doctor or hospital is out of the carrier's network.
- The insurance carrier deems the procedure experimental.

Insurance companies provide customers with an appeal process that you can follow when you and your doctor believe the decision was incorrect. In general, an appeal will succeed when:

- The insurance company received incorrect information that is corrected by your doctor.
- The information the insurance company received was incorrectly coded.
- Your doctor provides peer review documentation about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the surgery.
- Your doctor submits additional documentation that proves the medical necessity of the surgery.
- Your doctor calls the medical director at the insurance company to clarify any misunderstandings.

### *Helpful Hints*

Your team at SSI works diligently to ensure that you get the treatment you need to live a full, pain-free life. We keep you informed of your progress, both physically and financially. To make your insurance coverage work most efficiently, take the following steps. We'll do the rest:

- Make sure your address and contact information is updated at SSI and your insurer.
- Check your policy before you arrive.

- Tell your SSI team about all your policies, including Medicare, which pays for most medically necessary surgeries, and other supporting insurance plans.
- Inform your doctor's office about any lapses in premium coverage you may have.
- Understand your deductibles and prepare to pay those.
- Ask for an estimate of costs prior to the surgery so you can prepare for any co-payments.
- Request information about helpful government agencies if your policy does not cover the necessary back surgery.

Work with the administrative team at SSI to ensure proper insurance coverage. Get the medical help you need while getting the financial support you deserve.



## Chapter 5

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### *Before Back Surgery*

**O**dds are that you won't need back surgery if one of the many non-invasive treatments at the Southeastern Spine Institute (SSI) works. At SSI, surgery is the last option, only considered when all other SSI our patients undergo a surgical procedure. And this conservative approach serves you well.



## *A Conservative Approach*

Southeastern Spine has in-house Pain Management and Physical Therapy departments on its campus in Mt. Pleasant, SC, to offer alternatives to surgery. In addition, the spine physicians follow a multidisciplinary approach when it comes to back care. Specialists consult with each other to deliver a comprehensive diagnosis and treatment plan specialized for your condition. A correct diagnosis is the first step toward effective treatment.

Over the years, experience has shown that a conservative approach to relieving your back, arm, leg and neck pain can get you back to your normal life again in the most efficient manner. As a result, the spinal physicians at SSI have developed a wide range of non-invasive and minimally invasive procedures to ease your pain.

## *Non-Surgery Options*

The non-surgical spinal procedures offered by the Southeastern Spine Institute include:

- **Caudal Steroid Injection** delivers a steroid medication and a local anesthetic directly into your lower back to relieve radiating leg pain.
- **Celiac Plexus Block** can help diagnose and treat the pain associated with abdominal cancer or pancreatitis.
- **Cervical Epidural Steroid Injection** treats neck, shoulder and arm pain emanating from swollen nerves in your neck.
- **Discography** helps your spine physician determine the cause of lower back pain. The injection often is followed by a CT scan.

- **Facet Joint Injections** deliver medication and anesthetic directly to your spine to ease your pain, similar to the Caudal Steroid Injection.
- **Fascia Iliaca Block** stops nerves in your hip from carrying pain signals to your brain. Although not for everyone, it is effective and safe.
- **Lumbar Epidural Steroid Injection** can treat pain in your lower back and legs from conditions such as sciatica.
- **Lumbar Sympathetic Block** treats the pain carried by your sympathetic nerves, the nerves on either side of your spine.
- **Lumbar Transforaminal Epidural Steroid Injection** delivers anti-inflammatory and local anesthetic directly to your spine to reduce swollen nerves.
- **Medial Branch Block** stops the pain from either of the medial branch nerves of your spine's facet joints by interrupting the pain signals.
- **Occipital Nerve Injections** deliver medication into the back of your neck to ease neck pain and headaches.
- **Racz Caudal Neurolysis** involves an injection of medication into the base of your spine to stop lower back and radiating leg pain.
- **Sacroiliac Joint Steroid Injection** puts anesthetic and steroid medication right where your sacrum and pelvic bone come together to relieve lower body pain.
- **Selective Nerve Root Blocks** deliver a local anesthetic and steroid medication where nerves exit your spinal column to ease pain at its source.

- **Stellate Ganglion Block** stops pain from sympathetic nerves in your neck from reaching your brain. It also reduces swelling.
- **Trigeminal Nerve Block** reduces or even eliminates debilitating facial pain from an irritated or damaged trigeminal nerve.
- **Trigger Point Injections** can treat the pain from uncontrollable muscle spasms by delivering anesthetic and cortisone into the muscle.

## Chapter 6

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# *Prepping for Back Surgery: What to Do*

**Y**ou shouldn't take lightly any surgery on your spine — even minimally invasive surgery. But if you need back surgery, if surgery is the only solution to resolving your back pain once and for all, you should prepare for it cautiously, thoroughly and wisely. Consult your surgeon before your back surgery, but review the tips presented below to help you prepare... and fully recover.

### *Back Surgery at SSI*

The Southeastern Spine Institute (SSI) has its own ambulatory surgery center on its campus in Mount Pleasant, SC. That means you don't have to go anywhere else for your procedure, regardless what you need. It also means that you'll have outpatient surgery for most procedures — go in during the day and go home that same day.

That doesn't mean the surgeons rush through your procedure and push you out the door. Quite the contrary. The SSI ambulatory surgery center is fully equipped with everything your skilled surgeon needs to perform your operation safely, effectively and

completely. And with detailed instructions and pain medication, you can recover more quickly in the comfort of your own home.



### *What to Know Before Surgery*

Always follow any special instructions your surgeon provides.

Here are more tips to help you prepare for surgery:

- If your surgeon requires tests before your procedure, schedule the tests at least three days before your surgery.
- Make sure your surgeon knows all the medications and supplements (especially blood-thinners) that you take on a daily basis. He may ask you to skip them temporarily before your back surgery.
- You need to remove any body piercings before your procedure. If you can't do it yourself, have it done professionally and safely.
- If you regularly drink alcohol, including beer or wine, stop at least two days before your surgery.

- Arrange to have a responsible friend or relative accompany you to your surgery to drive you home afterward. You can't drive yourself, and you won't be allowed to call a taxi.
- You do not have to change your diet or exercise regimen, but remember that being healthy before your procedure will aid your recovery after the operation.

### *On the Day of Your Procedure*

- Do not eat or drink anything — including water, gelatin, gum or mints — on the day of your back surgery, starting at midnight the night before your operation.
- Arrive at SSI at least an hour before your scheduled appointment.
- Leave your valuables at home, including any jewelry.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing with flat-heeled, slip-on shoes.
- Do not wear makeup or contact lenses.
- Tell your surgeon if you don't feel well on the day of your surgery.

### *Trust the Surgeons at SSI*

Back surgery is serious business that only board certified, experienced surgeons should undertake. Don't trust your spine to just anyone with an "M.D." after his name. The surgeons at the Southeastern Spine Institute are all board certified or board eligible in Orthopedic Surgery. Each surgeon has undergone specialized training and has extensive experience in evaluating spine issues and performing spinal surgeries. Sufficient preparation removes much of the stress brought on by back surgery.



## Chapter 7

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# *10 Questions to Ask Before Your Back Surgery*

If your spine physician at the Southeastern Spine Institute (SSI) tells you that you need back surgery, it's most likely that your symptoms and condition haven't responded to more conservative treatments. In this case, surgery may be the best course of action to relieve your back pain. But before you submit to your surgeon's recommendation for back surgery, you should fully understand the implications. You must prepare and know what to expect.



Asking questions does not mean you are questioning your doctor's expertise. All surgeons want their patients to be knowledgeable about the procedure they've recommended. They also want you to know what to expect. Ask questions until you're comfortable with the procedure, the surgeon and the facility. Here are the 10 most important questions to ask before your back surgery:

### *1. Why do I need this surgery?*

Your back surgeon should be able to clearly explain what the procedure will do to correct your condition, whether it's to permanently relieve your pain or to help you regain your range of motion. Ask about other treatments or alternatives to surgery. Your surgeon can list what you tried already that wasn't successful, leaving back surgery as your only viable option.

### *2. What are the risks?*

This is one question you absolutely have to ask. All surgery, no matter how minor, carries some risk. Many of the surgical procedures at SSI are minimally invasive, which reduces the risks. Know in advance what the risks are, how likely they are to occur and what complications may affect your recovery.

### *3. What will the procedure do?*

Ask your surgeon to explain what he will do during the procedure. It's often helpful to know the details of the procedure because then you can understand how it works to ease your pain or repair your spine. The way your surgeon speaks about the operation can help you gain confidence in him, too.

#### *4. What if I refuse the operation?*

All patients are given the option to decline back surgery; it's never done against your will. But if you refuse, your pain won't go away on its own. Your limited range of motion won't improve suddenly. Your physician is recommending surgery because no other treatment has worked.

#### *5. Can I get a second opinion?*

Some decisions to have back surgery are fairly straightforward. Other decisions require thought to weigh the pros and cons. If your decision falls into the latter category, by all means, seek a second opinion. The staff at SSI will cooperate with any other spine surgeon to help you make your decision.

#### *6. How many times have you done this procedure?*

When you're ready to proceed with the operation, ask your surgeon about his experience. Again, you're not questioning his competence; you're just asking how familiar he is with the procedure he's going to perform on you. Your surgeon's answer will ease your concerns and give you confidence in him.

#### *7. Where will your surgeon perform the operation?*

At SSI, all surgical procedures are performed in the state-of-the-art ambulatory surgical center (ASC). The ASC is outfitted with all the latest technology for conducting safe back surgery. Plus, having your surgery here saves you time, money and convenience. You don't have to check in at a hospital, and the staff at SSI works together all the time.

### *8. Will I be unconscious during the procedure?*

General anesthesia knocks you out while local anesthesia merely deadens the pain locally. Most back surgery is done with the help of general anesthesia. Ask about the anesthesiologist — in fact, ask to meet him or her beforehand. Ask about experience and training until you feel comfortable.

### *9. What about my recovery?*

This is another absolutely required question to ask. Find out how long your recovery will take, whether you can recuperate at home and what limits you'll face while you heal. Some back surgery requires extensive rest and then aggressive physical therapy. Make sure you know what to expect so that you can make the appropriate arrangements.

### *10. How do I pay for the operation?*

Before you submit to back surgery, find out if your insurance company covers it. Ask about your co-pay. Find out what portion of the costs you will be responsible for. Paying for your procedure is nearly as important as being comfortable with having it done. Again, know what to expect, even financially, before you have the operation.

## Chapter 8

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# *4 Reasons Why Same-Day Surgery Is a Smart Idea*

First, let's define what "same-day surgery" is and what it isn't. Same-day surgery is an outpatient procedure, meaning you go in for the surgery, recover under the watchful eyes of professionals and then return home to complete your recuperation. Same-day surgery doesn't mean a surprise mandate from your doctor during a routine check-up.

Especially when it pertains to Charleston back surgery, same-day surgery is a planned operation often scheduled in an ambulatory surgery center (ASC). The surgery is usually minor or routine, and your full recovery doesn't require constant medical supervision. Same-day surgery, in other words, is a smart idea. Here are the advantages of outpatient back surgery at the Southeastern Spine Institute (SSI):

### *1. Reduced Costs*

When you can have your surgery in an ASC instead of in a hospital, you'll save money. You get the same medical professionals caring for you as in a hospital. An ASC is a fully

functional operating suite, instead of one of many operating rooms within a hospital complex.

Another factor keeping costs down for Charleston back surgery in an ASC is the lack of overnight facilities. Since you will be spending the night after your surgery at home or in a comfortable nearby hotel, the facility doesn't need to maintain an extra room for that purpose.



## *2. Just as Safe*

Surgery in an ambulatory surgery center is just as safe as the same procedure in a hospital. The Southeastern Spine Institute, in particular, has the only ASC specifically outfitted for spinal surgery in South Carolina. Most ASCs are inspected regularly and certified by one of several certification organizations, such as:

- The American Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities (AAAASF)

- The Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC)
- Healthcare Facilities Accreditation Program (HFAP)
- The Joint Commission

### *3. Convenience*

If you were to have your surgery performed in a hospital, you have to get there in the morning, wait around until they're ready for you and often spend the night there. Meanwhile, your family has to drive back and forth to drop you off, check in on you and pick you up. It's never an easy process.

On the other hand, since the ASC is on SSI's campus, you don't need to go anywhere new. You come in for your appointment prepared (see below) for your back surgery, and you go home the same day to recuperate. It's not only convenient, but it saves you and your family time as well.

### *4. Easier Recovery*

Outpatient back surgery uses the latest endoscopic techniques. Your spinal surgeon makes a tiny incision through which he passes a camera and his tools. Often, he can repair the damage to your spine and surrounding tissue without creating new damage. All this makes your recovery much easier and safer.

You also will appreciate being able to recuperate at home instead of in the hospital. The food will be better, for one, and you will be more comfortable in your own bed than in a strange bed in a strange room. Being away from the stress of a hospital environment will speed your recovery.



### *Preparing for Your Charleston Back Surgery*

Your spinal surgeon will provide you with a list of instructions before your surgery. Follow them. These are instructions, not recommendations.

You cannot eat or drink anything after midnight the night before your procedure since it increases the risk of complications. You may be advised to stop taking certain medications. Arrange to have a family member or friend drive you home. You will not be discharged until your ride is present.

## Chapter 9

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# *New Techniques in Endoscopic Surgery*

**A**ny time a surgeon can avoid cutting into muscles and making large incisions, it creates a better way to treat a back problem. And that's the philosophy of the doctors at the Southeastern Spine Institute. When they can avoid extensive back surgery, they do — with pleasure.



Endoscopic procedures provide an ideal solution to prevent the massive surgical treatments of the past, as well as the extensive recovery from back surgery previously required. Doctors today rely on small incisions to insert scopes for both diagnosing and treating back complications. Also referred to as minimally invasive surgery, endoscopy is the treatment of choice whenever possible. And techniques keep improving.

### *From Overnight to Same-Day*

Some of the latest endoscopic techniques are so much less invasive than traditional back surgery that you very well may be able to go home on the same day as the procedure. Micro Endoscopic Posterior Cervical Discectomy is one such procedure used to relieve the arm and neck pain caused by diseased or herniated discs. Your spine surgeon uses tiny instruments to remove the offending bone material and take pressure off compressed nerves.

Another valuable tool used in endoscopic back surgery to relieve herniated discs is the laser. A Percutaneous Laser Discoplasty is ideal if you have a bulging disc that is still intact. You may need to stay in bed at home for the rest of the day, but you'll leave the SSI campus with just a Band-Aid covering the small incision.

### *Tiny Tools Keep Getting Smaller*

The surgeons at the Southeastern Spine Institute stay abreast of the technological advancements in minimally invasive spine surgery techniques. They come to rely on smaller and smaller instruments to treat your back problems when more conservative treatments like physical therapy fail.

Over the past 10 years, astounding accomplishments have been achieved in the area of endoscopic procedures. A few examples include:

- 3D images projected from the tiny cameras inserted through incisions as small as a needle prick
- Balloon kyphoplasty that requires two needle-size incisions
- Spinal fusion procedures that need one-half to one-inch-long incisions
- Percutaneous insertion of clamps, rods and screws through small incisions
- Damaged disc removal from the same small incision where the camera was inserted
- Intraoperative X-ray imaging for precise computer-guided placement of hardware into the spine with no extra cuts
- Microscopes inserted into the tiny incisions to provide an excellent view of your nerves

### *Receive the Benefits of Endoscopic Back Surgery*

In addition to less, if any, time in the hospital and a much quicker recovery period, the benefits of endoscopic surgery sit squarely in your favor. They include:

- Less blood loss
- Decreased stress on your body
- Reduced risks of damage
- For patients previously unable to undergo back surgery
- Reduced costs

To receive all the benefits, however, you must rely on a trained team of experts in endoscopic back surgery. You'll find those and

more at the Charleston-based Southeastern Spine Institute, where physicians maintain their certifications and training in all the latest and greatest techniques for your well-being.

## Chapter 10

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# *Avoid Scarring with Minimally Invasive Surgery*

Frank had a slipped disc in the fall of 1960, and his doctor recommended surgery to eliminate the pain caused by the spinal material rubbing on the nerves in Frank's back. The back surgery techniques used were highly invasive, leaving Frank debilitated for nearly half the year. After a lengthy spell of bed rest (about 6 weeks) and months of physical therapy, Frank was able to return to work and his normal activities.

When summer approached, however, Frank was reluctant to join his family at an upcoming pool party. He was told that the long scar on his back was sensitive to the sun and would not tan like the rest of his skin. His young daughter told him the scar looked "gross," and he didn't want to scare the children. So Frank stayed home.

### *Back Surgery Techniques Were Invasive*

In the past, back surgery of any kind meant that you would be left with a large, sometimes unsightly scar down your back or over your abdomen. Recovery from these kinds of invasive techniques

was often a lengthy, painful process as well. And results could never be guaranteed.

To reach the offending disc and make the proper adjustments, the surgeon had to cut through the muscles and tendons. While adding to the recovery time, these back surgery techniques left the muscles weaker. When you factor in the crude sutures used to close the incision, you were left with glaring proof that you had undergone major back surgery.



### *Fast Forward*

Thanks to new, less invasive back surgery techniques, those horror stories are very few and very far between today. Instead, many back surgeries are so minimally invasive that you almost need a magnifying glass to see the tiny incision that remains.

Minimally invasive surgery, also referred to as MIS or endoscopic surgery, is the preferred method of the back surgeons at the Southeastern Spine Institute. And even endoscopic surgery is done only after exhausting all other treatment options. The endoscopic



procedure has revolutionized the operating room and very often can even be done on an outpatient basis.

### *The Process*

An endoscope is a tiny camera that's inserted into a small incision on your back, front or side. With real-time images from the camera, your spine surgeon can see the problem and use the same line of sight to make repairs. And voila, very little blood loss, no lacerated muscles and an incision that often can be closed with a simple Band-Aid or a couple tiny stitches, which normally are made in a natural fold of your skin.

It's these latest back surgery techniques that the surgeons at the Southeastern Spine Institute proudly offer patients who need back surgery. As an added bonus, your recovery time is greatly reduced. The success rate for permanent results has proven to be much higher as well. And you can attend as many pool parties as you like without fear of scaring the children. Your back surgery will never become the center of attention at a party... unless you want to brag about it.

## Chapter 11

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# *The Best Candidates for Fusion Surgery*

Spinal fusion surgery prevents movement between vertebrae that are rubbing against each other and causing you pain. After the procedure, the two vertebrae are fused together, eliminating any movement between them. Your pain should then completely disappear, permanently.

For some, spinal fusion provides remarkable results. While the spinal doctors at the Southeastern Spine Institute perform surgical procedures only as a last resort for treating back pain, spinal fusion can lead to long-term pain resolution for the right candidates.

And while there are a number of approaches your spine surgeon can take to provide relief, most spinal fusion procedures involve:

- Bone grafts applied to the affected area of the spine
- Setting up the right biological responses between the vertebrae to initiate and support the graft taking hold
- The actual spinal fusion to stop the movement in the painful joint

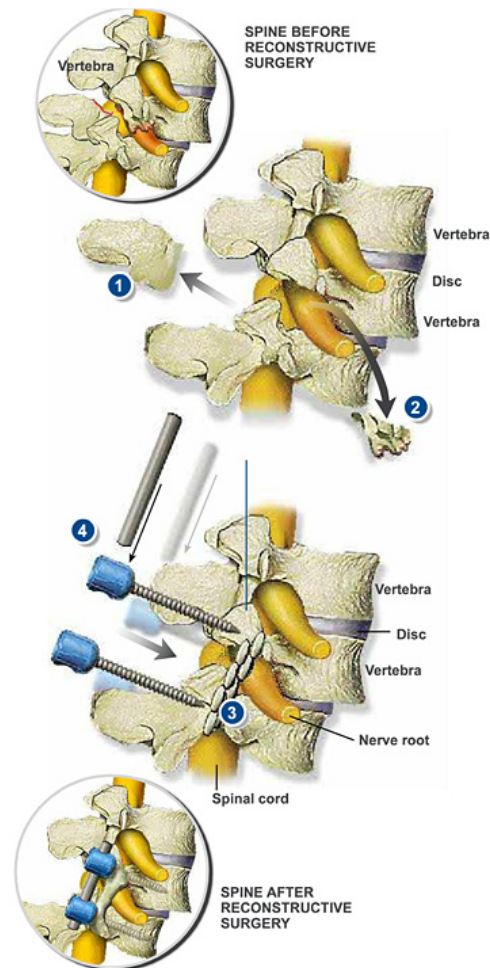
## *Best Candidates for the Procedure*

Spinal fusion is considered one of the best procedures to treat people with:

- Lumbar Spondylolisthesis
- Lumbar Degenerative Disc Disease
- Scoliosis
- Unstable or weak spine
- Spinal fractures
- Deformities

Whether spinal fusion is right for you depends on a number of factors that your physician will discuss with you. Ideally, the procedure works best when there are only two vertebrae involved in the movement that requires the graft. With a one-level fusion, you may not even notice any limitations in your movement.

Spinal fusion on two levels may feel slightly restrictive, depending on the location of the afflicted vertebrae. Once you go beyond two levels, though, you'll definitely notice a marked reduction in movement. Lack of movement often results in more pain, which is why the expert surgeons at the Southeastern Spine Institute seldom perform the procedure on three or more levels. Typically, spinal fusion of three or more levels is reserved for those with the most



severe spinal handicaps, such as extensive scoliosis or life-threatening deformities.

### *Everyone's Role*

Both you and your spine surgeon play a big role in successful spinal fusion. First, you need an accurate diagnosis, with clear objectives for the procedure. You need a spinal surgeon who's adept at the procedure, so don't be afraid to ask how many times or how often your doctor's performed it. You'll find the physicians at the Southeast Spine Institute eager to talk to you about their experience.

The rest of the responsibility for success rests with you. Spinal fusion works best on people who do not smoke, are not obese and live a relatively healthy lifestyle. As with any surgery, a positive attitude goes a long way. Additionally, you must be motivated to pursue the physical therapy that's going to be required following your spinal fusion surgery. You'll work with an experienced physical therapist whose goal is to get you back to your regular daily functions as quickly as possible.

So trust the process and get ready to do your part — you stand a very good chance of being relieved of your back pain permanently. Spinal fusions almost always lead to pain-free living with little or no residual complications.

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For more information on preventing back pain and avoiding spinal surgery, contact the specialists at the Southeastern Spine Institute:

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- (866) 774- 6350 or 1-866-SPINE-50
- [www.southeasternspine.com](http://www.southeasternspine.com)