

New Lumbar Fusion Procedure Results in Pain Relief, Quicker Recovery and Return to Normal Activities

By Keith Hartenberger

An estimated 10 million American adults suffer from chronic back pain that limits their activities. To alleviate that pain, physicians typically have performed traditional or “open” surgery, accessing a patient’s spine through the front or back of the body.

Using a new surgical procedure — eXtreme lateral interbody fusion (XLIF) — the spine is accessed through a small incision on the side of the body. The procedure is less invasive, provides greater access to the spine, takes less time, is less disruptive on muscles and bones, results in less blood loss and fewer complications, and allows for more complete disc removal and implant insertion than traditional procedures.

Recovery is also quicker — days versus weeks or months.



P. Ronjon Paul, M.D., one of the first spinal surgeons in the country to perform the XLIF procedure, is teaching the innovative lumbar fusion technique to doctors throughout the Midwest.

“Most XLIF patients are able to stand and walk the evening after morning surgery,” says P. Ronjon Paul, M.D., spinal surgeon, Edward Hospital and DuPage Medical Group. “And, most are discharged from the hospital the next day and return to normal activities earlier than they would if surgery had been performed through the front or back of the body.”

Conditions that may be helped by the XLIF procedure include degenerative disc disease with instability, recurrent disc herniation, problems related to previous fusion or nonfusion surgeries, degenerative spondylolisthesis (slip of one vertebra forward over another) and degenerative scoliosis (curvature of the spine).

Edward Hospital has become a teaching



Mary Bonda, 63 years old, has been pain free since her XLIF procedure in February of 2007. She says her back is “beautifully lined up.”

center for this innovative approach to lumbar fusion. Spinal surgeons from the Midwest have been visiting Naperville to observe Dr. Paul perform the XLIF procedure. Dr. Paul also recently conducted an XLIF training course for 20 surgeons as part of the Society of Lateral Access Surgery’s Surgeon Education program.

UP AND MOVING

Mary Bonda, a 63-year-old Winfield resident, has been pain free since February of 2007 when the XLIF procedure was used to correct a previous lumbar fusion procedure.

Mary’s problems started about four years ago with pain in her legs. She was found to have a fractured bone in her spine, something that probably happened earlier in her life. Her doctor fused her fourth and fifth lumbar vertebrae, but Mary still had pain.

Using the XLIF procedure, the old implant from the previous fusion was removed, new implants were inserted and Mary’s third, fourth and fifth lumbar vertebrae were fused.

Mary was walking up and down stairs at the hospital before she left. Her only pain was the soreness related to the incision that was made for the procedure.

Mary’s friends are amazed. She says they expected to find her “down and out” following the surgery, but she surprised them by answering the door and moving around the house with no problems. She takes regular 2-mile walks, says her legs are fine and that she’s as strong as she can be.

“I’ve always been very fit and athletic, doing aerobics and other activities, so for me it’s been phenomenal to feel that good again,” Mary says. “The procedure is wonderful. My back is beautifully lined up.”

‘ABSOLUTELY NO PAIN’

Jennifer Lindquist, a 63-year-old nursing instructor from Elgin, walked out of the hospital one day after her XLIF procedure in February of 2007. Just two weeks later, she was driving herself to physical therapy appointments.

Prior to that, Jennifer had struggled with pain from sciatica for more than two years. Physical therapy helped, but the pain still radiated down her left leg. That’s when she found out about XLIF, which was performed between her third and fourth lumbar vertebrae.

Shortly afterward, she was back to running on a treadmill. One year later, she’s been cleared to do anything she wants, including golf, something Jennifer wants to take up seriously when she retires in a couple of years.

“I wanted to get back to full physical wellness,” says Jennifer. “Now I have absolutely no pain. I feel an incredible sense of energy each day.”

P. Ronjon Paul, M.D., a spinal surgeon with Edward Hospital and DuPage Medical Group, and one of the few doctors in the Midwest with XLIF experience, contributed to this article in cooperation with Edward Hospital. ■