



Less is more: minimally invasive treatments for back and neck injuries



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Research studies suggest that the majority of adults will experience at least 1 episode of severe back or neck pain during their lives. While most of these are short-lived, and rarely dangerous, many patients are surprised just how disabling these episodes can be. Simple muscle strains usually respond within a few days or weeks to treatments like rest and anti-inflammatory medications.

Many visits to the doctors' offices or emergency rooms occur because of back or neck pain that continue longer than expected or because of severe pain that cannot be controlled. It is important to have your symptoms checked by a doctor if you are experiencing numbness, tingling, or weakness in an arm or leg. This could mean that there is pressure on a nerve.

If you are told that your back or neck problem requires treatment it is important to make sure that your doctor offers you the least invasive treatment option available. The first treatments to consider are physical therapy, chiropractic care, or acupuncture. Gentle treatments combined with a spine exercise and stabilization training program can be very useful and patients should respond within 4-6 weeks. These options defi-

nately fulfill the definition of "minimally invasive!"

For those of you with more complex spine problems it is usually a good idea to consult with a spine specialist. We are trained in the most up to date treatments available to get your pain addressed successfully. The most common test we use is the MRI scan because these scans do not use radiation, are very safe and provide a great deal of information about your back or neck.

Minimally invasive treatments for patients with back and neck problems have become more common and effective as technology has improved over the past 5 years. Epidural spinal injections are used to give patients relief of symptoms like sciatica. These injections are

done safely as an outpatient. By using an x-ray monitor the doctor can place a small amount

of medicine safely on the inflamed nerve and the patient can go home an hour later. If effective, the injection can help the patient avoid surgery.

If surgery becomes necessary, it is important to consult with a specialist trained in spine surgery. Spine Surgeons have advanced training in minimally invasive surgery techniques. Often the surgery is performed using a microscope and very small incisions that do not cut any muscle. Patients can usually go home that day.

Remember most back and neck pain does not result in surgery — there are many minimally invasive treatments to resolve your pain.



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