

Arthroscopic Microdiscectomy

Mark K. Chang, M.D., an orthopedic spine surgeon, is one of a very few doctors in the nation – and the only one in the Chicago area – performing a revolutionary new procedure to treat herniated discs and other disc-related problems. The new procedure, called arthroscopic microdiscectomy, or AMD, replaces many laminectomy or discectomy surgeries and is much less invasive than traditional back surgery.

“Eighty percent of Americans suffer from lumbar spine disability some time during their lives,” explained Dr. Chang. “In most cases, conservative treatments with physical therapy, analgesics, and/or rest are effective measures. But for some, even epidural steroid injections are not effective. To relieve the severe back or leg pain, weakness and numbness of a herniated disc, the only option left is surgical intervention.”

The traditional open surgical treatment for a herniated disc involves an incision on the back through which bone, ligament and disc material is removed, after pushing aside the nerve roots within the spinal canal. Although generally successful, this procedure is painful, requiring an average hospital stay of one to three days. Maximal recovery and return to work can take up to three months or longer.

“AMD offers many advantages over the open invasive techniques,” Dr. Chang said. “Unlike other surgically invasive treatments for herniated disc, AMD is performed on an outpatient basis. And because the procedure is minimally invasive, there is less risk to the patient, less pain, a lower risk of infection and a quicker recovery. In most cases, patients can return to normal activities within one to two weeks.”

Dr. Chang performed the first procedure at Ingalls [Memorial Hospital] last fall on 50-year-old Christine Hermanowicz of South Holland. Hermanowicz, who began experiencing severe back pain after working in her garden last summer, was diagnosed with a herniated disc. Following several rounds of physical therapy and two epidural steroid injections, which failed to relieve the pain, Dr. Chang recommended the new procedure.

“It was incredible,” Hermanowicz said. “I was in by 6 a.m. and out by 2 p.m. And the results have been phenomenal. Every single day, it was a little bit better, and after one month, I felt no pain at all. I never had surgery before. This was well worth it.”

A tax accountant who spends much of her day sitting, Hermanowicz is amazed with the results.

“I sit a lot,” she added. “And that’s the worst thing for a herniated disc. Even after sitting most of the day, I feel little or no discomfort at all.”

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