

Coming Back from a Back Injury

UPMC Passavant's state-of-the-art spine care services offer the latest surgical and nonsurgical treatments

Nearly 12,000 spinal injuries occur in the United States each year. While most are the result of motor vehicle accidents or falls, nearly 12 percent are the result of sports-related injuries. An accident, a sudden fall, or the accumulated trauma of several minor injuries can sideline anyone with a serious back injury.

Just ask John Busse* of Charleston, W. Va. The gifted basketball player started playing on his high school's varsity team as a freshman. By his senior year, John was close to matching the high school record of legendary NBA player and fellow West Virginian, Jerry West. But then he started experiencing lower back pain.

"I can't blame my herniated disk on any one injury," says John, now a wildlife biology/pre-vet major in his junior year at Auburn University in Alabama. "I continued playing until I realized I couldn't really feel my legs any more."

Following in his father's footsteps

John's dad — himself an active outdoorsman — wasted no time convincing his son to make the journey to Pittsburgh's North Hills for evaluation by Matt El-Kadi, MD, chief of Neurosurgery at UPMC Passavant and clinical professor, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. "My dad had undergone four failed back surgeries until Dr. El-Kadi operated on him. There was no question that's where I wanted to go," adds John.

* John Busse's treatment and results may not be representative of similar cases.

The Spine Center at UPMC Passavant features one of the region's most comprehensive programs for the treatment of spine injuries, with a multidisciplinary team of specialists who can provide both surgical and nonsurgical options.

"We're generally able to treat most back pain and injuries with conservative measures (including rest, medication, and physical therapy)," explains Dr. El-Kadi. "When an operation is the only option, we specialize in minimally invasive surgery, which incurs less damage to muscle tissue so that patients generally recover more quickly and experience less postoperative pain."

Spine Center offers advanced neurologic services

Individuals with back injuries have access to the latest imaging and diagnostic tools at the Spine Center. UPMC Passavant's new pavilion also houses a complete navigation suite for spine surgery where surgeons can perform a wide range of complex and advanced spine surgeries that attract patients from hundreds of miles away.

While most herniated disks don't require surgery, it was John's only recourse due to the extent of his injury. "Everything went like clockwork. Except for being a little stiff right after the operation, the whole thing was painless," he says. "I did physical therapy for a few months afterward, too, mostly for reconditioning. Nothing has stopped me since — I'm now playing intramural basketball and football at Auburn."



When to Get Help

Your back is an integral part of everyday movement, providing strength, flexibility, and stability for the entire body. Keeping your back healthy means knowing when to get help for an injury.

Minor back injuries can be self-treated with rest; over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medication for pain; the use of ice for the first 48 hours, followed by heat; and exercises to build the core muscles of the stomach and lower back.

However, Dr. El-Kadi recommends that you seek prompt medical attention if you experience any of the following after sustaining a back injury:

- Any neurologic symptoms such as numbness, weakness, or searing pain down the leg
- Bowel or bladder problems
- Pain that gets progressively worse
- Pain at night or at rest
- Longer-than-usual recovery time

For more information about the Spine Center at UPMC Passavant, or to make an appointment, call 1-877-967-2225, or visit www.UPMC.com/Passavant.