

ADVANCED SPINE CARE: LESS

Scott Perry and Matthew Ventura are a lot alike. Both are middle-aged and athletic, both worked for years in law enforcement. Now, they're partners in a business, Atlas Security Services. Recently, the two men even had the same surgery to relieve pain caused by disc degeneration and nerve compression in the neck.

Mr. Perry, 44, and Mr. Ventura, 52, chose Fabien Bitan, MD, director of spine surgery services at Lenox Hill Hospital. On both men, Dr. Bitan performed a breakthrough hybrid procedure that combines spinal fusion and artificial disc replacement. The surgery is designed to stabilize the spine while preserving motion. Mr. Perry and Mr. Ventura couldn't be happier with the results.

"I went home the day after my surgery," Mr. Perry said. "Within a week, I was back at work handling administrative duties. By six weeks, I was back to normal, working out and participating in athletic activities. The surgery was a great success."

Mr. Ventura said, "I saw the same professionalism in Dr. Bitan that impressed Scott, and I felt just as comfortable with him. Scott had the surgery first, and after watching the progress he made from week to week, I knew I wanted Dr. Bitan to do my surgery."

Many Conditions Treated

According to Dr. Bitan, minimally invasive spine surgery is safe and effective when performed by a physician with many years of training and experience. Results are similar to the outcomes with open surgery, but patients typically have fewer complications and recover faster. "Now, we can do many of the same procedures we performed with traditional surgery while causing much less trauma to the body. Patients usually go home the same day or the next morning," said Dr. Bitan.

At Lenox Hill Hospital, minimally invasive spine surgery is helping patients with disabling neck and back conditions get back to doing the things they love. Operating through small incisions, spine surgeons replace worn-out discs, ease pressure on pinched nerves, fuse bones and correct deformities. Patients have less postoperative pain, a shorter recovery and a quicker return to normal activities than with traditional open surgery.

Nathaniel Tindel, MD, a spine surgeon on staff at Lenox Hill Hospital, performs minimally invasive surgery to treat scoliosis, a sideways curve of the spine. He approaches the spine from the side rather than the front or back, so there is less disruption to muscle, blood vessels and nerves.

"In addition to all the benefits associated with minimally invasive spine surgery, like a smaller incision and a quicker recovery, it turns

out that the direct lateral approach is the most effective way to straighten the spine," Dr. Tindel said. "And it's safer."

Surgery: A Last Resort

"Most people with back and neck problems never need surgery," Dr. Bitan said. Many patients improve by making lifestyle changes, such as losing weight and exercising more. Other effective nonsurgical treatments include:

- medication to relieve pain and swelling;
- physical therapy to relieve pain and improve functioning;
- acupuncture, placing fine needles on the body to increase the flow of energy and blood;
- epidural steroid injections, injecting medication into the spinal canal to treat an inflamed nerve.

When spine surgery is needed, Lenox Hill Hospital can help. The hospital's experienced spine surgeons — experts in their field — use sophisticated equipment and the latest techniques to achieve the best possible results.

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Fabien Bitan, MD

Minimizing Tissue Trauma

Minimally invasive spine surgery is performed with an endoscope, a thin, lighted tube with a camera on the end, inserted through a small incision in the neck. The images are projected onto a video screen, which the surgeon watches as he operates. Muscles are spread, rather than cut, so there is much less blood loss, pain and scarring.

"In traditional open surgery, when you open the back completely and cut muscle to reach the spine, you create the potential for a lot of scarring later," Dr. Bitan said. "Scar tissue can cause discomfort, and it can increase the risk for complications in patients who need additional surgery down the road. If the nerves are buried in scar tissue they are at greater risk of being damaged, since their colors are similar to scar tissue, even under magnification."

PAIN, FASTER RECOVERY



Scott Perry, left, and Matthew Ventura, partners in a security services business, are both back at work after undergoing the same breakthrough spinal surgery procedure to stabilize the spine while preserving motion.

The Right Fit

For Mr. Perry and Mr. Ventura, minimally invasive spine surgery was the best choice. Both had disc degeneration at different levels in the neck that caused pain, numbness and other symptoms. The traditional treatment is a two-level fusion — joining three vertebrae in the spine to ease pain by stopping the motion between the vertebrae and decompressing the nerves. A downside is that this procedure puts added stress on the next level of the spine, and often, patients need more surgery within a few years.

Dr. Bitan said both men were good candidates for the cervical hybrid procedure, performed through a small incision in the front of the neck. Hybrid fusion stabilizes the spine and protects the disc at the next level from wearing out while preserving the patient's range of motion. That was especially important for Mr. Perry and Mr. Ventura because they are both very active on and off the job.

Mr. Perry, who had surgery in February 2011, feels great and is back to playing competitive racquetball. Mr. Ventura, whose surgery followed in April 2011, is also doing well — and even thinking about more surgery. Mr. Ventura has had lower back pain for years but never considered surgery because of the “war stories” he’d heard from others.

“Because of my great experience with Dr. Bitan, I plan to revisit my lower-back issues,” Mr. Ventura said. “I wish I’d met him 15 years ago.”

:: Troubled by an achy back? To learn more about treatment options, call **212-744-8114**, ext. **238** or visit **lenoxhillhospital.org/orthopedics**.