

Spine Tale

Kristin Greene Skabo

Christopher A. Yeung, M.D., and Susan D. Parker



I first injured my lower back seven years ago while playing with my son. I had re-injured my lumbar disc at least twice a year every year since then. However, this past April I began to feel a distinctly different pain. The pain radiated down my leg,

which was something I hadn't experienced before. Within a week, the pain in my leg and lower back were constant and became so debilitating that I was unable to sit. I could not sleep, I couldn't focus on anything besides the pain, and I could not walk! This time, my disc had herniated and was impinging on a spinal nerve.

I immediately went to the emergency room, but the physician simply gave me pain medication and dismissed me. However, when I remained unable to walk, I decided to reconsider back surgery. I had always felt intimidated by spine surgery, but then I realized, "I am having back problems and will for the rest of my life if I don't seek treatment. What if surgery alleviates the issues in the future?"

Beyond the physical limitations, my back pain affected me psychologically as well. I am a fit forty-one year old active mother. I couldn't understand why my body was breaking down. How had this happened to me? I didn't know if I would get better this time, and it was frightening. For seven years I experienced back pain, but I never sought treatment. After the rupture, I knew I needed help. Most importantly, I want to be able to always play with my son. He has lived most of his life with my injured back. When the last episode occurred, I told him that I was going to get better soon, and I would be careful so this would never happen again. He looked at me and said, "You say that every time," and walked away with his head hung. Needless to say, when my disc ruptured, I knew I had to make good on my word to never let this happen again.

One particular event made me reconsider a surgical solution. I had ruptured the disc two days before I had to travel to Washington, DC for meetings. Since I could not walk at all, I had to arrange to use a wheelchair. I had a meeting in the White House and was unable to walk through those halls I admired so much. I was holding back tears from the pain while trying to be coherent in my arguments. A meeting in the White House was such a special opportunity for me, and my damaged disc had ruined the experience. I couldn't let any more experiences pass me by.

Two weeks after the rupture, I met Dr. Chris Yeung.

Dr. Yeung recalls meeting Kristin and evaluating her back. "Kristin had managed intermittent back pain exacerbations for years. She likely had partial tears in the outer parts of the intervertebral disc (the annulus) which caused localized back pain. Eventually, the annulus weakened and the softer central part of the disc (the nucleus) herniated through the annulus and into the spinal canal and compressed her nerve."

"Kristin's images revealed she had a very large disc herniation compressing her S1 spinal nerve. It



Figure 1. The axial view of the pre-operative MRI shows a herniated disc (indicated by the red arrow) at the L5/S1 level.

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caused nerve damage with weakness, numbness, and debilitating pain (sciatica). This type of pain can turn even the most stoic person into a crippled shadow of themselves.”

“I treated her with a microscopic lumbar discectomy through a 2.5 centimeter incision to remove the disc herniation and relieve the nerve compression. She had arrived to the surgery center in a wheelchair and was able to walk out two hours later. She had immediate relief of her nerve pain and quickly recovered strength and sensation. This is a very successful procedure and is indicated for disc herniations in patients that have a significant neurologic deficit, debilitating pain, or have failed to get relief with an appropriate trial of non-operative care.”

Prior to my operation, I had always feared damaging the disc again. Would it be when I sneezed? How long will I be bedridden this time? How long before I could run around and play with my son? I lived in constant fear of the next injury. I wasn’t ever able to live in the moment and enjoy it. However, after the microdiscectomy with Dr. Yeung, I feel changed in so many ways. I can play football and soccer with my son! I don’t worry about when the next episode will

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be. Sneezing, twisting and bending don’t worry me. I no longer have to say, ‘I have a bad back.’ I have banished the phrase from my life!

For those experiencing back pain, don’t let life pass you by because you are always in pain or waiting for the next painful episode. Don’t let the fear of the surgery hinder you; the result is remarkable! 

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Christopher A. Yeung, M.D.

Dr. Christopher Yeung is a board certified, fellowship trained orthopedic spine surgeon at the Desert Institute for Spine Care in Phoenix, AZ. He has a special interest in minimally invasive spine surgery techniques with a philosophy of choosing the least invasive yet most effective method to treat spine problems. Dr. Yeung treats the full spectrum of degenerative and traumatic spinal conditions, and he has been the principal investigator in many FDA studies for artificial disc replacement and fusion alternatives. Dr. Yeung speaks nationally and internationally on the latest, most innovative treatment options in minimally invasive spine surgery and has published numerous articles. In addition, Dr. Yeung is the team spine surgeon for the Arizona Diamondbacks, the Los Angeles Dodgers, the Cincinnati Reds, and the Arizona Rattlers. He was recognized by his peers to be one of the top Phoenix spine surgeons in 2009, 2010, 2012 and 2013.



Susan D. Parker

Susan Parker is the Director of Marketing at Desert Institute for Spine Care (DISC), a spine surgery practice in Phoenix, Arizona. She specializes in business development, strategic partnerships, sales, and marketing. Susan has spent the majority of her career in biologic and medical device sales, often chosen for national task forces and leadership roles in training and mentoring peers. Her experience includes regional, national, and international sales and marketing for Johnson & Johnson, Sanofi-Synthelabo, Reebok International, and Desert Institute for Spine Care. Named a Marketing Expert in the Worldwide Who’s Who in 2012, Susan is passionate about using her skills and expertise to help patients find pain relief at DISC.

