

While I was on vacation recently in Florida, I met a local gentleman who was a fellow scuba diver. He was kind enough to lend me some of his gear. During our initial conversation I mentioned that I was a chiropractor. His wife was with him and I could tell she wanted her husband to ask me some questions. He told her I was on vacation and shouldn't be bothered, so at the time I didn't find out what his questions might be. After I returned his equipment at the end of the week he heeded his wife's advice and asked his questions.

It turns out that he has been suffering with lower back and leg pain for some time. He also has experienced a significant amount of muscle loss in the same leg. He is in the coast guard and has been seeing the military doctors for his condition. They diagnosed him with degenerative disc disease and have treated him with medication including spinal pain injections and with physical therapy. Nothing has helped.

The problem with the medication was that it was merely treating the symptoms. The physical therapy was ineffective, because with physical therapy it is difficult to isolate the specific malfunctioning joints.

Degenerative disc disease is a progressive problem likely caused by long-standing malfunction of the joints in the spine. As it progresses it can damage the spinal nerves. The nerves in the lower back where he had the degeneration, travel down the leg. Pressure on nerves can cause pain, numbness, muscle weakness, and muscle atrophy among other things.

I asked him if he had tried chiropractic. He said that he had, but it wasn't covered by his military insurance and the visits costs were \$100 per visit. As a result, he only went a few times. I asked him if he noticed any improvement when he went and he said that he did feel better afterwards, but in a few days or so the pain returned.

I advised him that chiropractic care, like physical therapy and exercises, takes repetition to achieve results. Each treatment session makes small changes and these small changes build upon each other. In the resort town where he lives, the visit fees might be higher than normal, but I suggested he consult with other chiropractors in the area to see if they have lower fees. I told him that it might take one to three months for him to achieve a significant degree of improvement.

Surgery is an option and one that he might need to consider, but surgery has its own risks and it is almost always better to try all conservative approaches before using more invasive procedures like surgery.

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