

Artificial hips, knees, and now vertebral discs

Until it hurts, people rarely think about their back or spine. But, approximately 80 percent of people in the United States will experience at least a single episode of significant back pain in their lifetime, and for many, spinal disorders become a lifelong cause of disability.

“The spine reflects our modern times,” says **Dr. Jens Chapman**, professor of orthopaedics and sports medicine at the University of Washington, who practices at the new **Regional Spine Center** at UWMC-Roosevelt. “Wear and tear, our overall health, our work, our metabolism, our diet, our attitude, and the medications we take, all affect the spine,” he says.

The spine is a long chain of 33 bones and joints creating 26 motion segments. It is strong and protects the spinal cord. It’s also flexible and allows the body to bend and rotate.

Back pain can come from many places up and down the spine, from the larger nerves that lead down the legs, to the smaller nerves that innervate the spine. The large muscles in the back, called the erector spinae, may become pulled or strained, the bones, ligaments or joints themselves may be injured; and the tissue between the vertebrae, called the discs, can also become a source of pain.

Spine problems may respond to simple exercises or may require complex surgical intervention. Surgical intervention may range from minimally invasive procedures such as microdisectomy to major spine fusion using stabilizing implants and bone grafts.

“We are on the horizon of a new day in spine surgeries – changing the focus from salvage surgery to reconstruction,” says Dr. Chapman. “We’re seeking ways to maintain function and motion.”



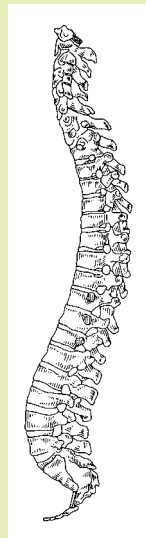
Dr. Jens Chapman

“We are on the horizon of a new day in spine surgeries – changing the focus from salvage surgery to reconstruction,” says Dr. Chapman.

One common back injury involves pinched nerves and vertebral discs, which are the cushioning sacks of fluid between the vertebrae of the spine. One way to alleviate this type of pain is called decompression, a surgical procedure where a small portion of the bone over the nerve root and/or the disc from under the nerve root is removed to create more space for the nerve to heal. In some cases, tiny titanium cages and bone pieces will be used to support the area surrounding the disc.

“The future appears bright with the evolution of minimally invasive decompression techniques and artificial disc replacements,” says Dr. Chapman.

It is evident that spine problems involve both the skeleton and the nerves. The best spine care integrates both neurological surgery and orthopaedic surgery to assure the best in diagnoses and management. The new Spine Surgery Center at UWMC-Roosevelt brings together surgeons from both of these departments for patients with spine problems and their referring physicians.



“We offer thorough care for patients with spine disorders,” says **Dr. Christopher Shaffrey**, associate professor of neurological surgery. “Our services include evaluation of patients, diagnosis, rehabilitation, therapies, and functional capacity. Our providers are known nationally and internationally and this specialized spine clinic gives efficiencies for the patient that will optimize their treatment.”



Dr. Christopher Shaffrey

The latest in spine treatment technologies are available at the Spine Surgery Center as well as opportunities to be involved in studies of the newest treatment methods, such as the prospect of disk replacement.

For more information about the Spine Surgery Clinic, or to schedule an appointment, please call 206-598-4288. More information about spine disorder treatments, including discussions with orthopaedic surgeons in streaming video, is available on the Web at www.orthop.washington.edu/back_spine.