

Cervical Discectomy Delivers Relief for Disabling Neck Pain

David plays centerfield for an active men's softball league in Southern Maryland. In addition to the typical post-game aches and pains, the 34-year-old child support probation officer from California, Maryland had a history of ongoing arm and neck pain with extensive conservative care. When, once again, he woke up with significant weakness in his arm, and couldn't move his neck to the left, he set out to seek medical care. Friends referred him to spine specialist Steven Hughes, MD, at Commonwealth Orthopaedics.

An MRI revealed a herniated disc in David's cervical spine. Cervical disc herniation is the painful rupture of the outer cartilage of one of the discs that cushions the vertebrae in the neck. In David's case, the herniated disc was compressing his nerves and spinal cord. Dr. Hughes recommended surgery as soon as possible to relieve the pressure and avoid further damage.

David opted for an anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF), a common and successful surgery to resolve herniated discs and other spinal conditions. In this procedure, the surgeon makes an incision in the front of the neck to reach the spine, removes the damaged disc and fuses the vertebrae together with a bone graft. A titanium plate and screws are used to increase stability between the vertebrae.

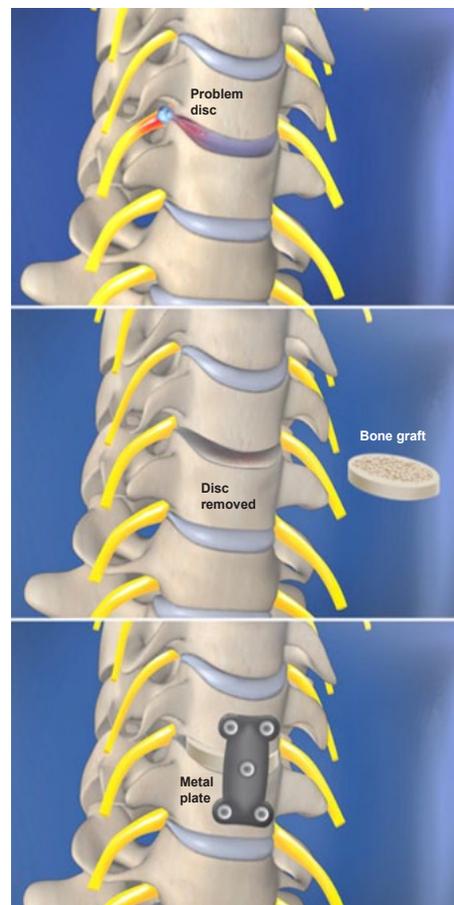
Advantages of the anterior approach (from the front) include better access to the cervical spine, less muscle disruption and less post-operative pain. "ACDF surgery is one of the most effective and safe ways to deal with recalcitrant, disabling problems of the neck," Dr. Hughes says. "The minimally invasive procedure is life changing for most patients with negligible loss of movement and the recovery is very quick. Indeed, in many instances it can be measured in days."

For David, the promise of a fast recovery was a major selling point. So was the fact that Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning had successfully returned to football after an ACDF. Just that week, Peyton had thrown a record-breaking seven touchdown passes in a single game.

David's surgery went smoothly and brought immediate relief. "As soon as I woke up, the stiffness and numbness on my left side were gone," he recalls. "I was able to move freely even though I had a plate and screws in my neck and I was all sutured up." He spent the night in the hospital and returned home the next day.

As Dr. Hughes predicted, David's recovery was fast and trouble-free. "He told me not to hold back – to go out and do everything I normally do. I couldn't hurt the surgery," he says. After a couple of days off, he was back to his normal activities, including driving and working around the house. He returned to the softball field within a week. No rehabilitation was necessary and he only wore his hospital-issued neck brace a couple of times.

Six months later, David cannot say enough good things about Dr. Hughes and the Commonwealth team. "Everyone was wonderful, and Dr. Hughes was completely awesome. I've already referred several people to him since my surgery. I couldn't have asked for a better experience or a better doctor to handle my needs."



Steven S. Hughes, MD, graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Rochester and completed his medical degree with honors from the University of Rochester School of Medicine. Dr. Hughes worked as a surgical intern at Bethesda Naval Hospital and was later honorably discharged after serving as a Commander in the United States Navy. Following his internship, he completed an orthopaedic surgery residency at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester and a fellowship in spinal surgery at Case Western Reserve Hospital.

For full biographies and a complete directory of the physicians at Commonwealth Orthopaedics who perform these and other procedures visit our website at www.c-o-r.com.