

Treating a Pain in the Neck

Advanced Care for Cervical Spine Conditions

When Hayley's right arm began to hurt several years ago, she wasn't sure what was wrong. The 48-year-old Springfield mother stopped playing tennis and wore a wrist brace, but the pain only intensified. Eventually, she came to Commonwealth Orthopaedics for steroid injections and physical therapy. Although the treatments didn't stop the pain, they did reveal a surprising fact about its source: it was coming from her neck.

Hayley consulted Commonwealth surgeon Thomas Mazahery, MD, who has a special interest in treating conditions of the cervical spine. Sure enough, an MRI showed two severely ruptured discs in her neck compressing nearby nerves. Dr. Mazahery recommended she have surgery right away.

"Patients with this condition, known as cervical radiculopathy, typically feel pain that radiates from their neck into their shoulder blade, down their arm and possibly into their hand," he says. "It can affect any age group, from those in their late teens and early 20s to people in their 70s and 80s. Younger patients usually have a soft disc herniation, while older ones have arthritic or degenerative changes that create bone spurs that dig into the nerves. At Commonwealth, we also see patients with a combination of both."

The good news is that about 70 to 80% of patients respond to conservative treatment. This can include time to see if the nerve calms down, anti-inflammatory medications, physical therapy with traction to take pressure off the nerve, or cortisone shots in the neck. For patients such as Hayley whose pain persists, or who have progressive weakness or instability of the spine, Commonwealth offers the latest minimally invasive surgical options.

"Anterior cervical discectomy and fusion is the most common procedure for cervical radiculopathy," says Ron Childs, MD, a Commonwealth Orthopaedics spine specialist. "The surgeon makes a small incision in the front of the neck and removes the damaged disc to take pressure off the nerve. The open disc space is then filled with a bone graft, which helps the adjacent vertebrae to fuse. The bone graft and vertebrae are often immobilized

and held together with metal plates and screws. Following surgery, the body begins its natural healing process and new bone cells are formed around the graft."

Two of the biggest surgical advancements that Commonwealth offers are bone graft substitute and high-tech instrumentation.

"Instead of taking bone from the patient or using an allograft from a cadaver, as we did in the past, we now use man-made plastic, ceramic, or bioresorbable compounds. This material is packed with shavings of living bone tissue inside a cage," explains Edward Lane, MD, a Commonwealth physician who performs spine surgery and many other orthopaedic procedures. "Coupled with the newest minimally invasive surgical instruments and high-tech surgical microscopes, it makes surgery much easier on our patients. They experience far less pain and blood loss, fewer complications, and a significantly faster recovery."

Hayley's anterior cervical discectomy and fusion provided instant pain relief and her condition continues to improve. She spent one night in the hospital and returned to her job with the Department of the Navy two weeks later. Within six weeks, she was back to her regular schedule and activities. She is currently working hard to strengthen her arm so she can play tennis again later this spring.

"My entire Commonwealth experience was positive," she says. "Dr. Mazahery is a great doctor – very down to earth and personable. And the surgery was extremely successful. It's such a relief to be rid of the pain, which was making me sad and had changed my life. Now I definitely recommend surgery to others in my condition. There's no reason to live in constant pain."

Video Extra!

Check out the symptoms and treatment for pinched nerves in the video by Thomas Mazahery, MD
www.c-o-r.com/videos





Ronald C. Childs, MD, earned a BA in Psychobiology from Boston University before going on to complete his medical degree and orthopaedic surgery residency at Howard University. Dr. Childs then pursued additional training in Chicago where he completed a spine surgery fellowship program at Rush-Presbyterian—St. Luke's Medical Center.



H. Edward Lane, III, MD, earned his medical degree from Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington, DC. He then completed his internship and orthopaedic surgery residency at Georgetown University Medical Center.



Thomas Mazahery, MD, received a BA in Biology from the University of Virginia and earned his medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia. He then completed a general surgery internship and an orthopaedic surgery residency at Northwestern University. Additionally, Dr. Mazahery completed a spine fellowship at Case Western Reserve University.

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.



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