

Kenai Spine

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In affiliation with
Central Peninsula Hospital

Retail vendor back to work after artificial disc surgery to relieve a painful neck

As a successful product vendor, Brenda thrives on a busy lifestyle. One day she began having neck pain that radiated into her left shoulder, arm and fingers. The symptoms came on so sudden that at first she thought, "heart attack". Even though the pain went away, Brenda did not hesitate to make an appointment with her general practitioner. The doctor examined Brenda and took X-rays. He encouraged her to try conservative treatment options first for her neck pain, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS) and physical therapy.

Brenda tried the conservative care and the pain relievers did help some. But the relief was only temporary and her radicular pain would return. In fact, instead of going away, her pain was getting worse and she began having numbness and tingling into her fingers. Simple things, like carrying a purse on her shoulder or picking up merchandise at a store, were becoming impossible. She also had difficulty moving her neck from side to side. Her condition was now interfering with normal function.

Brenda returned to her doctor and he then referred her to fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon Dr. Craig Humphreys, because of his expertise in the field of spine. Dr. Humphreys examined Brenda and ordered an MRI of her cervical spine. The diagnostic results showed a herniated disc in her neck.

The spine surgeon talked with Brenda about her treatment options. He explained to her that typically, patients with herniated discs in the neck area would need a surgery that would involve removing the damaged



The spine surgeon creates a small incision in the front of the neck. This allows access to remove the damaged disc and replace it with an artificial disc that retains motion in the neck and aligns the cervical spine (see illustration above). During a traditional spinal fusion, a metal plate is inserted which locks the vertebrae together. ©ViewMedica, Image used with permission.

shock absorbing disc that resides between the neck vertebrae and replacing it with a bone graft that would fuse and lock the neck vertebrae together. This "cervical fusion" surgery, however, limits neck rotation, and in some cases, causes more stress on other discs in the neck.

Dr. Humphreys next talked to her about a clinical trial study he was involved with that would replace the damaged disc with an artificial disc implant that preserves motion and relieves pressure from the pinched nerves. He discussed with her the disc replacement surgery option and how it could retain spinal motion.

While Brenda was unsure about spine surgery she also knew she could not continue to live and work with the pain symptoms. "Dr. Humphreys was very calming and gave me the peace of mind I needed to move forward with the new cervical artificial disc surgery. He made sure I knew what to expect before and after the procedure," Brenda remembers.

She enrolled in the study and Dr. Humphreys performed the artificial disc replacement surgery. Though recovery from the spine surgery was not easy, the surgery was successful. Brenda was careful to follow the post surgery care instructions. She was very relieved to find that her neck and shoulder pain was gone. She could also move her neck from side to side once again.

Today, she is not limited in her activity level. Brenda has returned to work full time and is happy to report no more neck or shoulder pain.

S. Craig Humphreys, M.D.

Fellowship-Trained Spine Surgeon, Board-Certified Orthopedic Surgeon

Dr. Craig Humphreys earned his undergraduate degree at The University of Notre Dame. After graduating from the University of Notre Dame, he attended Loyola Stritch School of Medicine where he received his medical degree. He then completed an Internship and Residency at Loyola University Medical Center while also volunteering time as an MD in other countries, including India, St. Lucia and Lithuania. Dr. Humphreys then completed a Fellowship in Orthopedic Spine Surgery at The Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. In 1996, he joined the Center for Sports Medicine and Orthopaedics in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he practiced for more than 15 years with a spine specialized practice attracting complex spine patients from across Tennessee and northern Georgia. Dr. Humphreys' practice philosophy is to explore and exhaust all non-surgical options in advance of the patient considering spine surgery. This includes the use of spine-specialized therapy and injections that can relieve pain symptoms. Kenai Spine includes spine-specialized physical therapy to complement and augment his spine surgery expertise. Dr. Humphreys is glad to be a part of the Alaska medical community, and welcomes other physicians to contact him directly.

