



Leigh Ballantyne
once again enjoys
running.

“The pain was having a big impact on my ability to do the things I love to do,” she recalls. “Just getting through the day was difficult.”

“She was pretty miserable,” agrees Dr. Jeffrey Roh, an orthopedic surgeon and spine specialist with Orthopedics International.

An MRI showed problems with two of the spinal discs in Ballantyne’s neck, known as cervical discs. Both had degenerated, and both had ruptured, causing the intense pain.

LIKE A JELLY DOUGHNUT

The intervertebral discs are the soft, rubbery pads found between the vertebrae that make up our spinal columns. Dr. Roh likens them to a jelly doughnut. “On the outside, you have the dough, a very tough material, which surrounds a gel-like material inside,” he explains. “If you get a hole in the doughnut, over time, the jelly can ooze out. When it happens at breakfast, the result is jelly on your shirt. When it happens to your spine, the result is ‘jelly’ pushing against the nerves of the spine, causing debilitating pain.”

According to Dr. Roh, “once they get into their 30s and 40s, about 25 percent of patients can have degenerative changes in their intervertebral disc spaces. Once they get beyond their 40s, the number jumps to 60 percent. It’s a normal process of aging, but in a vast majority of patients, it doesn’t become symptomatic at all.”



Jeffrey Roh, MD

“The hip bone IS connected to the neck bone!”

A spine surgery that Leigh Ballantyne calls “totally amazing” is putting a new twist on the old song. Gone, finally, is the neck, shoulder and arm pain that had started to consume the life of this 42-year-old wife, mother of two and busy volunteer.

Not only did Ballantyne have symptoms, her persistent pain was worsening with each passing week. When medication and other conservative approaches didn’t provide relief, she and Dr. Roh opted for surgery at Evergreen Hospital. As she put it, “I knew those discs weren’t going to fix themselves, so I said, ‘Let’s just fix them.’”

Dr. Roh chose an anterior cervical discectomy and fusion, or ACDF. “It’s probably one of the most common procedures that we perform in spine surgery,” he shares. The ACDF is a minimally invasive procedure that cleaned out Ballantyne’s herniated discs and removed the herniated fragments that were pushing against her spinal cord and nerves. Dr. Roh then built the area back up by using a piece of bone from Ballantyne’s hip...so as Ballantyne likes to say, “the hip bone *is* connected to the neck bone!” A plate and six screws hold it all together.

“I’M SO GLAD I DID IT!”

Leigh Ballantyne was in the hospital for two days and took it easy for the first few months. But now she’s as good as new – and pain-free.

Dr. Roh says Ballantyne’s recovery is typical of ACDF patients. “Up to 90 to 95 percent of these surgeries are successful. The pain relief can be almost immediate. Patients typically bounce back pretty quickly.”

Ballantyne couldn’t be more enthusiastic about the results. “I’m so glad I did it! I have a lot of my life left to enjoy.”

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