



Nancy Mendenhall

is back to her active lifestyle.

The 73-year-old Mendenhall was riding in a Zodiac speedboat on some rather rough seas. The boat smacked against the waves, and she felt a really sharp pain in her spine. She remained flat on her back for the duration of the trip, and came to Evergreen Hospital just as soon as she got home.

Orthopedic surgeon Dr. J. Scott Price of the Evergreen Orthopedic Center offered her two choices – she could spend the next several months in a brace and let it heal naturally, or she could opt for a relatively new surgery called kyphoplasty. “It was an easy choice,” Mendenhall says, “because I’m too active to just sit around.”

TWO SMALL INCISIONS

The kyphoplasty procedure takes about an hour, and most patients are able to return home the same day. “It involves making two small incisions in the back, each about a quarter of an inch long,” Dr. Price explains. “Then you pass a small tube into the broken

vertebra from either side and insert a deflated balloon. The balloon is then filled with water, which creates a space in the vertebra and restores it to its original height.” The balloon is then deflated and removed, and bone cement – glue – is then placed into the space left behind. The cement solidifies in about 15 minutes, and acts as a grout to stabilize all the fracture fragments and hold them together while the bone heals.



J. Scott Price, MD

“My life is completely back to normal now.”

Retired teacher Nancy Mendenhall knew there were plenty of uses for glue – it had been a staple in her elementary school classrooms. But she’d never heard of gluing a broken back, until a vacation outing left her with a compression fracture in her lower spine.

Mendenhall says the pain relief was immediate, and Dr. Price agrees that’s fairly typical of kyphoplasty patients. “Their back will be a little sore from where they had the incisions,” he says, “but they distinctly notice a difference almost immediately in how their back feels.”

Kyphoplasty has been around for about five years, and is used for thoracic and lumbar fractures. Dr. Price points out that the procedure continues to evolve, with new techniques looking at biodegradable cement, which would be absorbed by your body over time. “We’re also looking at it for other applications, for example, in the pelvis,” he says, “because this is another region at risk for osteoporosis-related fractures.”

“I’M DOING GREAT!”

Injuries such as Mendenhall’s are very common. “There are hundreds of thousands of compression fractures a year,” Dr. Price states. “If you think you have one, it’s important to check it out right away, so kyphoplasty or other treatments will be most effective.”

Nancy Mendenhall had to be careful for 90 days after her surgery and avoid heavy lifting, but that was it. “Being able to have my injury repaired so quickly certainly has let me continue to lead a life I really enjoy,” she enthuses. That includes a trip to Germany and an Alaskan cruise since her surgery just a year ago. “My life is completely back to normal now. I’m doing great!”

For a referral to an Evergreen-affiliated orthopedic surgeon or a brochure on Evergreen’s orthopedic program, please call the Evergreen Healthline at 425.899.3000.