

“MINIMALLY INVASIVE SPINE SURGERY”

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Minimally invasive surgery is a broad term given to a range of spinal operations with a common goal: a less traumatic cure that allows the patient a faster return to a normal lifestyle. It is a modern method of performing traditional spine operations. Minimally invasive surgery decreases the size of the incision, reduces the amount of blood loss, decreases the amount of muscle damage, shortens hospitalization and reduces scarring. The damage to the surrounding muscles and other tissue is minimized because of the small incisions and therefore allowing a faster healing and recovery process.

Candidates for minimally invasive surgery are patients who have failed a course of “conservative” treatment. Generally, conservative treatment consists of giving the patient time to recover, supplemented with adjunctive care, including medication, physical therapy or chiropractic adjustments. For the few patients who do not improve with conservative treatment, further testing is conducted. The possible tests that may be performed include an MRI scan, CAT Scan, Discography or EMG.

The diagnostic test will identify the source of the pain and determine which type of minimally invasive procedure should be conducted: discectomy, laminectomy or spinal fusion. These operations are done to relieve pinched spinal nerves, which are generally associated with leg pain, numbness, tingling and weakness. Some patients perceive a sensation of leg fatigue or heaviness. Minimally invasive techniques make these surgeries less painful and thus ease recovery. Although, traditional surgical procedures are very effective in treating these issues, the minimally invasive approach is more beneficial and produces superior results. Patients frequently go home the day of surgery and return to work—depending on their job—in days to weeks as opposed to several months.

Minimally invasive technology is showcased in spine fusions. A spine fusion is typically required for patients with a deformity or an unstable spine. Traditional fusions normally require blood transfusions, four to seven days in the hospital and three to six months out of work. With minimally invasive fusions and synthetic bone grafting material, patients are usually discharged from the hospital in one to two days and return to work much more quickly.

Minimally invasive spine surgery has rapidly evolved in recent years and now includes some of the most complex spine surgery fusions. It was developed to effectively treat disorders of the spine with minimal muscle-related injury and with quick recovery. The history of this technique has moved forward in great strides. Technological advancements of the last two decades have made minimal invasive surgery possible.

David M. Kruger, MD of Greater Hartford Orthopedic Group is one of the few spine specialists in Connecticut to perform minimally invasive spine fusions. His dedication to improving the quality of life of his patients has encouraged him to learn and provide this new and improved technique. Dr. Kruger is board certified in orthopedic surgery with a specialty in spine surgery and has been successfully performing operations for 16 years at St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center.