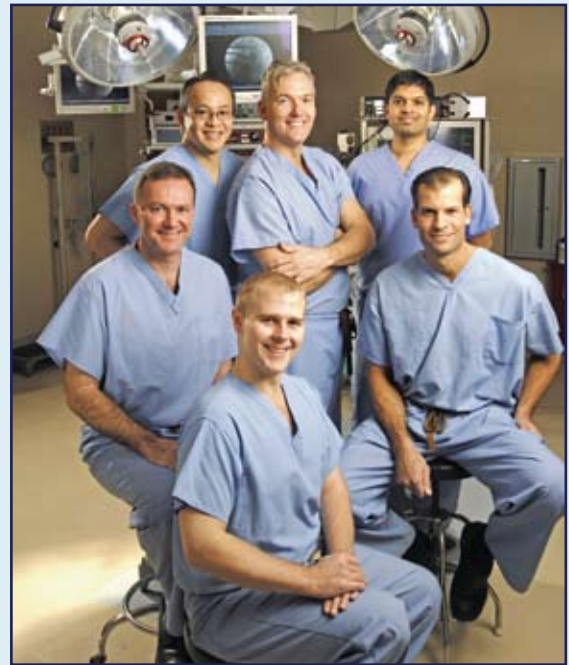


On a Personal Note...

Welcome to The Virginia Spine Institute (VSI) newsletter! As the premier center of excellence for spinal health care in the DC Metropolitan area we are committed to patient education and wellness. Through this newsletter, our goal is to provide you with useful information to incorporate into your life and keep you up-to-date with advancements in the spinal health care field.

As cold weather departs and spring returns, gardeners will kick into high gear planting and cleaning up their garden. With this in mind our feature article covers some tips for moving carefully, correctly and comfortably while gardening. Keep in mind that proper warm up is essential for any type of activity. Warm-up stretches prepare joints and muscles for what is to come. It will enable your body to perform at its best and protect against injuries, aches and stiffness. Stretching before an activity will enhance blood flow and nutrition to your spine, thereby helping to avoid injury.

Sincerely,
The Doctors and Staff at The Virginia Spine Institute



The Healthy Gardener

After working in your garden all day, do you crawl into your bed feeling stiff, sore and out of shape? Unlike other activities—sports, for example—in which you learn and master specific techniques, most gardeners simply get out there and “dig in” without thinking about the way they move. Therein lies the problem.

Misusing your body while you garden places stress on your muscular and skeletal systems, which can cause discomfort or injury. And when your movements are awkward and inefficient, you waste effort and energy. Below are some basic rules for moving carefully, correctly, and comfortably while you work on your garden chores.

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The Healthy Gardener

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Make turning movements slowly and smoothly, whether you're working on the ground or standing up. Abrupt, rapid twists and turns stress the spinal discs, especially if you twist from the waist only without moving your lower body.

Lifting:

When lifting something heavy, we tend to anticipate the weight of the object and tense our bodies in preparation, which causes unnecessary tightening of our muscles. Instead, let your body determine how much support is needed during the process. To effectively lift a heavy load, place one foot slightly in front of the other. Place your body weight over the forward leg for better balance—that way, your entire body can participate in the lift, with the powerful thigh muscles (quads) playing a major role.

When lifting anything heavy, always center yourself directly in front of the object. Hold the load close to your midline for better balance and back protection. When exerting effort, do not hold your breath. Exhale through your mouth at the peak of the effort. Avoid lifting heavy objects overhead and lifting anything heavy if your footing is insecure.

Bending:

All bending movements should originate by inclining your torso forward from the hip joints while bending the knees. Over-rounding your back stresses your spinal disks. Your feet should be a comfortable distance apart; if they're too close together, you won't have a stable base. If you prefer, place one foot slightly in front of the other, which helps you lift yourself from a lowered position.

Carrying:

Your arms, not your hands and fingers, should be the predominant source of power when carrying objects. Avoid clutching heavy objects with your hands or fingertips. Carry heavy loads close to your body to protect your back, arms, and shoulders. When carrying a heavy or bulky object such as a large flowerpot, rest it on your forearms and

against your body. Whenever possible, avoid carrying a heavy load, such as a filled watering can, in one hand. This causes the body to sag and displaces one hip to the side, stressing your hip and lower back. A rule of thumb, green or otherwise: Make several trips carrying light loads rather than one back-stressing effort.

Pushing:

When pushing a heavy load in a cart or wheelbarrow, use your leg strength to assist your arms and shoulders. When your knees are bent, your quads can support the push. When pushing a heavy load uphill, accompany the effort with deep, fluid breaths. Also try to keep your abdominal muscles pulled in for back protection. If you find the load too heavy to handle, let someone else take the handles.

Dragging and Pulling:

When moving backward and dragging something in front of you, such as a tarp filled with soil, keep your knees flexed and your back just slightly rounded. When moving forward and pulling something behind you, such as a wheelbarrow or hose, avoid twisting your upper torso. Face directly forward (shoulders squared) as you move, whether you're pulling the load with one or both hands.

Reaching overhead:

When working with your arms raised overhead (pulling at a vine or pruning a shrub), avoid locking your elbows or hunching your shoulders. For better stability and range of motion, place one foot slightly in front of the other. When reaching overhead, avoid arching your lower back. To keep neck strain at bay, avoid dropping your head too far backward. The higher you lift your chin, the more stress you're placing on the cervical spine.

Turning:

Make turning movements slowly and smoothly, whether you're working on the ground or standing up. Abrupt, rapid twists and turns stress the spinal discs, especially if you twist from the waist only without moving your lower body. When moving soil or compost with a spade or pitchfork, swivel your entire body, turning your feet in the direction you are moving the load.

5 Habits to Avoid

- Dropping your head too far backward
- Tensing and hunching your shoulders
- Bending over from the waist with knees locked
- Overarching the lower back

(Source: Perlman, Barbara. "The Healthy Gardener: The Right Moves." www.gardeningclub.com)

Patient Spotlight:

Patient: *Giddeon Massie*

Diagnosis: *Radiculopathy*

Treatment: *Minimally invasive lumbar decompression*

Giddeon was born the son of a professional baseball player, so athletic ability came naturally. He played baseball for a while, but at age nine began to pursue competitive cycling. Giddeon's lifelong dream has been to obtain a medal in the Olympics and The Virginia Spine Institute has helped him to pursue this goal.

After years of cycling, the miles had finally taken a toll on Giddeon. He came to The Virginia Spine Institute with pain and weakness in his left leg resulting in diminished foot speed when he was pedaling. "His symptoms were consistent with that of lumbar nerve compression or radiculopathy due to disc degeneration and herniation." said Thomas C. Schuler, M.D., F.A.C.S. When asked about the extent of disc degeneration seen in this young athlete, Dr. Schuler replied "The amount of strain these cycling athletes place upon the lower lumbar discs is tremendous, particularly when training at Giddeon's level." In July of 2007, spine surgeons Dr. Schuler and Dr. Brian R. Subach performed a minimally invasive lumbar decompression procedure at the L4-L5 level on Giddeon with great success.

"I chose The Virginia Spine Institute because I knew I would receive the best spinal health care possible. Dr. Schuler and Dr. Subach set me at ease right away. I liked the prospect of two expert spine surgeons working together, and given their combined experience in treating athletes at all levels, I knew that I was in very capable hands. Although I was not thrilled about the need for spine surgery, they made me feel confident that my outcome would be successful. I was impressed with how simple and uncomplicated the process was. I was back to competitive cycling four weeks later, competed at the National Championships at eleven weeks, winning two more national titles, and competed in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China. It is impossible to express my gratitude and appreciation for the care I received from The Virginia Spine Institute. From the physicians to the staff, the concern and compassion were genuine and heart-felt," said Giddeon.

Giddeon Massie's Achievements in Track Cycling:

- 2008 Olympian
- 2004 Olympian
- 7 time World Team Member
- 10 time U.S. National Champion



Above: Giddeon Massie at the 2008 Keirin event.



Above: Giddeon Massie at the 2008 Olympic opening ceremony in Beijing, China.

Fast Facts About Back Pain

Back pain affects tens of millions of people each year in the U.S. In fact, according to an independent national survey of Americans conducted by NASS*, 65 percent of individuals polled stated they experience back pain at least once a month or several times a month. Here are some other interesting findings:

- One in three Americans said they suffer from back pain every day or nearly every day!

- Some people's pain is short lived -- 39 percent stated they suffer for only a few hours, yet a quarter of people (26%) claimed to be sidelined with back pain for at least a full day. Fourteen percent said they suffer for several days and one in 10 people stated they have constant back pain to some degree.

- Lower back pain is the most common spine complaint of 59% of Americans. Nearly one in every five people (19%) suffer from mid-back pain and 16% stated they have ongoing neck pain.

- Half of people polled (49%) claimed that their back pain has negatively affected their lifestyle. One-third stated that their spouse and family also are impacted.

- To relieve their back pain, more than half of those polled (53%) rely on over-the-counter and prescription pain medications.

- Nearly one in five Americans (19%) attributed aging to be the primary cause of their back pain issues. Twelve percent said it was due to an automobile accident and 11% claimed their pain is the result of a workplace injury.

- The majority of those polled (58%) have turned to more conservative treatment (such as physical therapy, spine manipulation and medication) as opposed to surgical intervention (9%).

**NASS Back Pain in America" Survey by Pulse Opinion Research April 2007 +/- 3 percentage points with a 95% level of accuracy.

VSI's Smoking Cessation Program:

Take Control of Your Smoking, Your Moods and Your Life

As part of our commitment to your total health and wellness, The Virginia Spine Institute is proud to announce our new Smoking Cessation Program. Our five week program includes information about: health risks associated with tobacco use, preparing a plan to quit, stress management techniques, nutrition to help prevent weight gain, prescription medications to help with withdrawals and cravings, and strategies to prevent relapse. The entire program costs \$100 and the next session is scheduled to start on Wednesday, March 11, 2009.

Call (703) 709.1114 ext. 161 or e-mail stopsmoking@spinemd.com to register for upcoming classes.



Effects of Smoking on Musculoskeletal Health

Smoking remains the number one cause of preventable death. Each year more than 400,000 people in the United States alone die from tobacco-related diseases. In fact, smokers can expect to live 7 to 10 years less than nonsmokers. Smoking is linked to heart and respiratory diseases and to several types of cancer. In addition, smoking has a significant impact on your bones and joints. All of the tissue in the human body is affected by smoking, but many effects are reversible. By avoiding or quitting smoking, you can reduce your risk of acquiring many of these conditions. Quitting can also help your body regain some of its normal healthy function.

Did you know that scientists have found that smoking is detrimental to your musculoskeletal health?

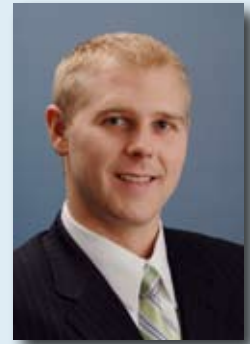
- Studies have shown that smoking reduces the blood supply to bones and that nicotine slows the production of bone-forming cells (osteoblasts) which impairs the absorption of calcium. With less bone mineral, smokers are more likely to develop weaker bones, which can lead to osteoporosis.
- Smoking increases your risk of developing exercise-related injuries such as sprains or fractures. Furthermore, fractures take longer to heal in smokers because of the harmful effects of nicotine on the production of bone-forming cells.
- Smoking increases the risk of low back pain with sciatica (back pain that spreads out to the hip and/or leg due to pressure on a nerve). Smoking blocks the body's ability to deliver nutrients to the discs of the lower back. With inadequate nutrition, these tissues become damaged, resulting in back pain.
- Smoking, which slows down the healing process, prolongs pain for people with back injuries, broken bones, or those who have undergone back surgery. In fact, smokers have a higher rate of complications after surgery than nonsmokers and their outcomes are less satisfactory.

ASK THE EXPERT...

Is there any way to strengthen my back in order to prevent pain?

There are a number of things that you can do to prevent back pain. The first and most important is to stay in shape. Aerobic exercise has been shown to markedly decrease chronic pain, including pain from your neck and back. Low-impact aerobic exercises like brisk walking or swimming are good for the discs that cushion the vertebrae. Also, weight-bearing exercises that improve balance like Yoga or Pilates are also good for the spine. I suggest that anyone with specific concerns work with a physical therapist or qualified personal trainer to develop a routine that works for you.

It is also important that you eat right and stay at a healthy weight because obesity increases stress on the back. A balanced diet which includes foods high in calcium and vitamin D can help to prevent future spine problems. Finally, it is important that you do not smoke. People who smoke have a greater incidence of low back pain and nerve pain. It is known that people who smoke are much more likely to need spine surgery than people who don't smoke. This happens because nicotine decreases the blood supply to the bones and discs in your spine. Without proper nutrition, the spine deteriorates faster which results in a higher likelihood of developing ruptured discs, degenerated discs, and arthritis of the spine.



Christopher R. Good, M.D.
Spine Surgeon

Going Green:

At The Virginia Spine Institute we are doing our part to help the environment by recycling, reducing waste and increasing awareness among our employees. We understand that going green is a gradual process and by implementing changes in our office we hope to operate more eco friendly. Each newsletter we plan to give you a few helpful tips that you can incorporate into your lifestyle.

Green Tip #2: How to Green Your Gardening

First of all, keep it real—stay away from pesticides, weed killers and chemical fertilizers. Layer on some all-natural compost instead! Next, go native—already adapted to local conditions, native plants are easy to grow and maintain, generally requiring less fertilizer and water, as well as less effort to rein in pests. When you're watering, remember that adding a rain barrel is an inexpensive and effortless way to capture mineral- and chlorine-free water for watering lawns, yards and gardens, as well as washing cars or rinsing windows. Also, adding mulch and compost to your soil will retain water and reduce evaporation. Finally, urban dwellers bereft of a yard shouldn't fret: you can still get in on the hoeing and growing action by signing up for a plot at your local community garden.

(Source: TreeHugger.com)



Laurie McGlynn
Medical Assistant
Virginia Spine Institute

"There are a number of options available today; from materials you can find around your house to a range of products you can buy that are both 100 percent natural and effective.

Did you know that you can recycle your coffee grounds or tea leaves. Plants which thrive in acidic soils benefit from this. Just take the grounds and work them into the soil surface around the base of the plant. Geraniums do especially well with this mixture.

Another tip is to use crushed egg shells, as they are a good source of calcium for your plants. Yes, plants need a good calcium balance to stay healthy. Egg shells will also help to keep slugs out of your garden."

Giving:

Spinal disease knows no boundaries. It affects everyone, male and female, young and old. As a patient at The Virginia Spine Institute you can certainly appreciate the need to find a cure for painful spinal conditions. VSI is committed not only to getting our patients back to their lives, but also to find the best options for those dealing with life altering spinal ailments. To further this goal VSI has committed its resources to The Spinal Research Foundation, a national 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to improving spinal health care for all Americans.

The Virginia Spine Institute is sponsoring The Spinal Research Foundation's DC Metro 2009 We've Got Your Back Race/Walk for Spinal Health. This national event was a great success last year. Many of our own patients set and accomplished personal goals by completing the run or walk. It was emotionally uplifting for those who overcame their struggle with spinal disease while simultaneously benefiting a great cause.

If you have suffered at any time in your life with neck or back problems, this is your race, your chance to make a difference! Together we can raise funds which directly contribute to life changing research and educational programs.

Join us on Saturday, May 16th for the 2nd Annual DC Metro We've Got Your Back Race/Walk for Spinal Health. To learn more about this exciting event, or to register for the race/walk, visit www.SpineRF.org. If you have any questions related to the event please contact Christine Rodriguez at 703-766-5404.

Your support is greatly appreciated! We look forward to seeing you there!



Race, Walk and Spinal Health Fair

**Saturday, May 16, 2009
Reston, Virginia**

www.SpineRF.org

Community Classes & News

New VSI Website!

The Virginia Spine Institute has launched our new website. This site serves as a resource for our patients and the community to learn about spinal health.

New Features Include:

- Online Prescription Refill
- Interactive Video Tutorials
- Updated Patient Education
- Video Library
- FAQ Section
- Physician Bio Videos
- Website Search Feature
- And more

Visit us online at www.SpineMD.com



Virginia Spine Institute's Smoking Cessation Program

Learn how to stop smoking for good with physician supervision. A five week program that covers behavior modification, stress reduction and relapse prevention. Classes held on Wednesdays from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Program begins Wednesday, March 11, 2009 and is located at The Virginia Spine Institute.

To register or learn more about treatment options call (703) 709-1114 ext. 161 or e-mail stopsmoking@spinemd.com.

Virginia Therapy & Fitness Center Launches New Website with Online Bill Payment System

Virginia Therapy & Fitness Center (VTFC) is proud to announce the completion of their new website, www.vtfc.com. Features of the website include Patient Education, Program Descriptions, VTFC Online Store and a Online Bill Payment System. VTFC encourages anyone with questions regarding physical therapy, or seeking ways to maintain a healthier lifestyle, to visit www.vtfc.com or call (703) 709-1116.