

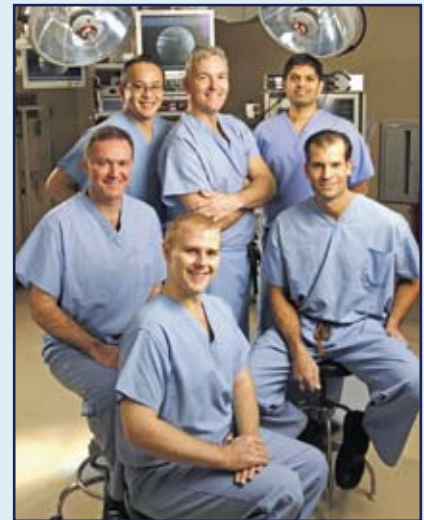
## *On a Personal Note...*

Welcome to the Virginia Spine Institute (VSI) newsletter! As the premier center of excellence for spinal healthcare 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 into incorporate in your life and keep you up-to-date in spinal health advancements.

You will notice that we have enhanced our newsletter! It is now available as a pdf file that you can download directly to your computer. If you are on our e-mail list you will receive a video from our office highlighting the contents of this newsletter and a link to download. You can also access our newsletter through our website at [www.SpineMD.com](http://www.SpineMD.com).

As the end of the year approaches we would like to thank you for helping us make 2008 a success! By referring your friends and family to our practice, we have been able to help over 7000 new patients this year. We are grateful to be in a position where we have the ability to restore our patients to full and active lifestyles. Our commitment remains strong as we continue to follow our mission in providing the best quality spinal healthcare with the greatest patient satisfaction.

Wishing you all the best this holiday season,  
The Doctors and Staff at The Virginia Spine Institute



## Advancements in Spine Surgery: Minimally Invasive Options

Minimally invasive is a very big “buzz” word right now in the spine surgery community. Many patients are coming in to our office hoping to have an “easier” surgery. But what does minimally invasive really mean, especially when most people think of spine surgery as “invasive” surgery?

When talking about a minimally invasive surgery, you must consider three factors: scar sizes, muscle dilation vs. stripping, and recovery time. These three factors separate a traditional surgery from a minimally invasive one.

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For warmth and protection when playing outside, wear several layers of light, loose, and water- and wind-resistant clothing. Layering allows you to accommodate your body's constantly changing temperature.



## Protect Your Spine This Holiday Season

During the hectic pace of the holiday season people unknowingly let down their guard. Common holiday activities such as decorating, traveling and winter sports can cause injuries. A combination of injuries may cause strain and over time lead to degenerative changes or pathology in the spine.

### Did you know?

- More than 49,100 luggage-related injuries occur each year.
- Approximately 500,000 winter sports-related injuries are treated in hospital emergency rooms, doctors' offices and clinics each year.
- Approximately 5,800 people are treated in emergency departments for fall-related injuries sustained while decorating each year.

To ensure people celebrate the season safely, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS) recommends the following tips.

### 1) Avoid Painful Falls

**Do not drink and decorate.** Save your celebratory drink for after the lights are up and illuminated.

**Select the right ladder for the job.** When working at low and medium heights, choose step stools or utility ladders. Extension ladders are ideal for use outdoors to reach high places, as when hanging items from the rooftop. The weight the ladder is supporting should never exceed its maximum

load capacity.

**Inspect ladders** for loose screws, hinges, or rungs that may not have been fixed from last use. Clean off any mud or liquids that have accumulated on the ladder.

**Properly set up the ladder** on a firm, level surface. Watch for soft, muddy spots or uneven flooring, and never place a ladder on ground that is uneven. Remember the 1-to-4 rule: the bottom of the ladder should be 1 foot away from the wall for every 4 feet that the ladder rises.

**Be careful when putting up holiday decorations,** including lights and trees. Move materials with caution when on the ladder and always position the ladder close to the work area, so you do not lose your balance and fall. Wear proper footwear with securely tied shoelaces.

**Use a step stool** instead of furniture to stand on when you need a few more inches to hang a wreath or picture.

**Be mindful of any rearranged furniture** and new decorations and make sure others in the house are familiar with the changes as well. Serious falls can happen when people trip over furniture placed in what used to be open space.

**Ask for help** when moving heavy or awkward items.

**Minimize clutter** and keep pathways clear of decorations, gift boxes and other items that can trip you up.

## 2) Manage your holiday “haul”

**Pack light** and use luggage with wheels when traveling.

**Take care when placing luggage in an overhead compartment.** First, lift it onto the top of the seat. Then, with hands situated on the left and right sides of the suitcase, lift it up. If your luggage has wheels, make sure the wheel side is set in the compartment first. Once wheels are inside, put one hand on top of the luggage and push it to the back of the compartment. To remove the luggage, reverse this process.

**Do not rush** when lifting or carrying a suitcase or heavy package. If a piece of luggage is too cumbersome when traveling, either check it or ask for help. At the mall, minimize heavy loads by making frequent trips to the car.

**Always use proper lifting techniques.** When lifting, bend at your knees and lift with your leg muscles, not your back and waist. Avoid twisting or rotating your spine.

## 3) Stay in the Game This Winter

**Wear appropriate protective gear**, including goggles, helmets, gloves and padding. For warmth and protection when playing outside, wear several layers of light, loose, and water- and wind-resistant clothing. Layering allows you to accommodate your body’s constantly changing temperature.

**Warm up muscles** with light exercise for 10 minutes. Begin your lifting routines with manageable weights and do not overdo aerobic activities. Replenish fluids to prevent dehydration.

**Know and abide by all rules of the winter sport** in which you are participating. Make sure equipment is in good working order and used properly. When hitting the slopes, take a lesson (or several) from a qualified instructor. Learn how to fall correctly to reduce the risk of injury.

**Seek shelter and medical attention immediately** if you or anyone with you is experiencing hypothermia or frostbite when in the cold.

## 4) Avoid Snow and Ice Injuries

**Speak with your physician** before clearing the driveway and sidewalk of snow if you have heart or vascular conditions. Do this regardless of whether you use a shovel or snow blower.

**Never stick your hands in the snow blower.** If snow becomes too impacted, stop the engine and wait more than 5 seconds. Use a solid object to clear wet snow or debris from the chute. Beware of the recoil of the motor and blades after the machine has been turned off.

**Warm up your muscles** for 10 minutes with light exercise and take frequent breaks. Shoveling snow is comparable to weight lifting. Replenish fluids to prevent dehydration.

**Clear snow early and often.** Begin when a light covering of snow is on the ground to avoid shoveling packed, heavy snow. Do not throw the snow over your shoulder or to the side. This requires a twisting motion that places stress on your back.

**Wear proper footwear** and look in front of you. Ice can cause sudden and serious falls. If you find yourself falling, try to fall on your side or buttocks. Roll over naturally, turning your head in the direction of the roll.

**Drive cautiously.** Allow plenty of time to brake as you approach stop signs and red lights, and reduce speed in hazardous conditions.



**Pack light and use luggage with wheels when traveling.** Do not rush when lifting or carrying a suitcase or heavy package. If a piece of luggage is too cumbersome either check it in or ask for help.

## 5 Simple Tips to Maintain Your Weight This Holiday Season

- 1 Keep healthful meals within reach. Keep low-fat frozen dinners, packaged salads, sandwich makings and reheatable pre-prepared meals on hand for hectic days.
- 2 Enjoy traditional holiday baking by making simple healthy recipe substitutions that lower the fat and calories in your favorite treats.
- 3 Offer to bring your favorite reduced-fat or low-carb dish to holiday parties or meals. That way you will be guaranteed there will be at least one diet-friendly item for you.
- 4 Keep walking. All that shopping is a great way to get some walking in, but don't use that as an excuse not to do your regular walk as well.
- 5 Have a small, healthful snack before leaving for a party to prevent over-indulging on the typically high-fat fare at holiday events.

## Advancements in Spine Surgery: Minimally Invasive Options

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Starting with scar size, the difference between a minimally invasive surgery and a traditional surgery is somewhat obvious. One typically leaves behind a large, long scar, while the other leaves behind a scar usually about the length of an inch to an inch and a half. But scar size is not a major signifier in whether or not a surgery is minimally invasive or not. The reason being that depending on how many levels of your spine are being operated on will determine how long scar is.

The biggest difference between minimally invasive surgeries and traditional surgeries is that of muscle dilation versus muscle stripping. Muscle dilation is achieved by using a series of sequential dilators to separate the fibers of the muscles in your back, making a small tunnel, giving the surgeon a view of your spine through a very small incision. By using these tubes or channels, along with a microscope or endoscope, the surgeon can access the part of your spine where the problem is without having to make a long incision along those spinal levels. When performing a traditional surgery, the physician makes an incision along all of the levels of your spine where the problem lies and "strips" the muscle off of the spine. This muscle stripping, rather than dilation can often play a role in how quickly a patient recovers.

The third factor when looking at a minimally invasive surgery is recovery time. This factor lies in tandem with the concept of muscle dilation. Often, a patient's recovery time after spine surgery is mainly based on the amount of "damage" that is done to surrounding "soft tissues" and anatomical structures. Obviously, the less manipulation and changes to soft tissue and anatomical structures that occurs during surgery, the less post-operative pain a patient will feel and the faster the recovery will be.

Minimally invasive options, though attractive, are not for everyone. If your physician recommends a more traditional open approach, it does not mean that your recovery time is going to be extremely long or painful. What is important, is to educate yourself on all of the surgical options available to you, discuss these options with your physician, and then rely on your physician to choose the best option for you that he is comfortable with performing.

To learn more about minimally invasive techniques visit us online at **[www.SpineMD.com](http://www.SpineMD.com)**.

*(Source: [www.back.com](http://www.back.com))*

## ASK THE EXPERT...

### *How did I herniate my disc?*

Lumbar disc degeneration often presents as a slowly progressive process. Many times the discs begin to lose water as they age, which makes the collagen in the center of the disc space a less effective shock absorber. The annulus fibrosis, the tough intertwined collagen layer surrounding the outside of the disc, is often under stress from degeneration as well. When specific activities are performed, such as bending, lifting, or twisting, the outer annulus can tear allowing the central disc material to leak out. This is known as a rupture or herniation of the disc. It is possible that such a herniation occurs without symptoms; however, most people experience some degree of back pain and also irritation of the leg nerves. The irritation of a leg nerve is known as sciatica, which commonly means buttock pain radiating down the leg below the knee. In some cases disc herniations may simply cause back pain without sciatica. In some cases, compression of a spinal nerve may cause a combination of pain, numbness and weakness.

Fortunately, the majority of patients improve with a conservative course of physical therapy and anti-inflammatory medication. Occasionally, oral or injectable steroids are used to calm down inflammation surrounding the spinal nerves to both alleviate symptoms and allow time for the disc herniation to actually shrink down in size. In some cases where there is evidence of progressive nerve damage or truly intractable pain, a minimally invasive surgical approach is recommended to alleviate the pressure on the nerve.

In general, lumbar disc herniations occur as a result of a progressive degenerative and aging process in the lumbar discs which is often punctuated by an injury which may be anything from a mild bend and twist to lifting something as heavy as a refrigerator. In most cases of back and leg symptoms, we advise seeing your spinal health care specialist as soon as possible to be sure that you are receiving the proper treatment.



Brian R. Subach, M.D., F.A.C.S.  
Director of Research/Spinal 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.



*"Recycle, recycle, recycle! The environment is now on everyone's mind and recycling is something easy that you can do to make a difference. Did you know that about 80% of what Americans throw away is recyclable, yet our recycling rate is just 28%? If you don't know where to recycle in your area visit [www.earth911.com](http://www.earth911.com) for a list of recycling centers in your area."*

Melissa Luke  
Clinic Coordinator  
Virginia Spine Institute

### Green Tip #1: Paper or Plastic?

**Answer:** Neither! Purchase your own reusable bag and bring it with you.

Did you know these facts about disposable bags?

- 14 plastic bags contain enough petroleum to drive a car a mile.
- 380 billion plastic bags or wraps are thrown away in America each year.
- Making a paper bag emits 70% more global warming gases than making a plastic bag.
- Paper bags do not biodegrade in landfills due to lack of oxygen.
- Cities spend up to 17 cents per bag in disposal costs wasting millions of tax dollars.

(Source: 1 Bag at a Time)

## Giving:

At The Virginia Spine Institute we are committed to creating positive change in our community through our philanthropic and volunteer efforts. As the holiday season is a time for giving, we would like to share with you some of the good deeds we have done. Hopefully, we inspire you to do the same.

### Virginia Spine Institute Donates To Reston Interfaith

On Friday, September 26, 2008 employees of the Virginia Spine Institute presented Reston Interfaith with a \$25,000 check. "In the tough economic times we face we can't forget about those who are most needy. We believe it is our responsibility to give back to the community that is directly served by our organization," said Dr. Thomas C. Schuler. Reston Interfaith is a nonprofit organization serving Northern Virginia that promotes self-sufficiency through support and advocacy for those in need of food, shelter, affordable housing, quality childcare and other services. To learn more about Reston Interfaith visit them at [www.restoninterfaith.org](http://www.restoninterfaith.org).



### Virginia Spine Institute's Winter Coat Drive

Did you know that 90% of homeless adults need a new, warm coat each winter because they have no place to keep one over the summer months? At The Virginia Spine Institute we are doing our part to help provide them with this basic necessity. "In this year's coat drive we anticipate to collect over 150 coats. It's the easiest way to do something for someone you don't know. By giving the coat off your back you are helping to spread the warmth," said Linda Brock, Administrative Assistant and Coat Drive Coordinator at The Virginia Spine Institute.

For more information on our coat drive contact [lbrock@spinemd.com](mailto:lbrock@spinemd.com).

## Community Classes & News

### Online With The Virginia Spine Institute

In January 2009 we plan to launch our new redesigned website. Our new site will serve as a resource for our patients and the community to learn about spinal health. New features will include online patient registration, online prescription refill, online bill pay, interactive tutorials and an updated patient education library.

Visit us online at [www.SpineMD.com](http://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 January 7, 2009 and is located at The Virginia Spine Institute.

For more information or to register call (703) 709-1114.

### Advancements in Spinal Healthcare - Community Seminar

Is neck or back pain keeping you from living the life you want? Join us for a free community seminar to learn about the causes of neck/back pain and your treatment options. The next seminar will be held on Wednesday, February 18th from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm, located at The Virginia Spine Institute.

For more information or to register call (703) 709-1114 ext. 180.

### Virginia Therapy & Fitness Center's Postpartum Health For Moms Program

Learn how to restore your body's form and function following pregnancy. A seven-course educational and lab-based series targeting women six weeks postpartum and beyond optimizes stability and movement patterns through muscle re-education. This program is located at Virginia Therapy & Fitness Center.

For more information or to register call (703) 709-1116.