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Then: Needed a metal rod to support her spine Now: "I do 10-minute headstands"

Kathy Simonik, 52, Barrington IL, Graphic Designer, Yoga Teacher

After several back operations and years of therapy, Kathy Simonik was advised 5 years ago to have two final surgeries to implant a metal rod running through much of her spine. Although it would drastically impede her range of motion--she wouldn't be able to turn her head without turning her entire body--the procedure, her doctors said, would relieve her incessant pain.

Simonik had good reason to be skeptical about the operation's success. Her last surgery, to implant two metal rods and six screws, left her with 18 months of sciatic nerve pain. So she ignored their advice and turned instead toward an obscure alternative treatment called naprapathy. "I left the doctor thinking, I gave this my all. I said no and never went back."

She mentioned her decision to a friend, who recommended that she see Patrick Nuzzo, a local naprapath. (Naprapaths are licensed only in Illinois and New Mexico. Learn more about naprapathic medicine.)



Pictured above, Dr. Patrick Nuzzo, with Kathy

Naprapathy is a form of manual medicine that, like chiropractic care, focuses on musculoskeletal conditions. "Where we differ from chiropractors is that we don't continually adjust the spine the way they do," Nuzzo explains. "We treat the tissue around it as well. Each vertebra in the spine is supported by 17 ligaments. Tension in those supports causes rigidity, reducing blood flow to nearby tissues. From her degenerative disease and the surgeries, Kathy had decades of tension built up in her spine. My challenge was to release that tension."

Simonik received treatments every 2 weeks and continues to today. Her mobility gradually increased and the intense pain faded. She was able to go off the pain medication she'd taken every day for years.

At Nuzzo's suggestion, Simonik began working with her yoga instructor (Chad Satlow) to strengthen her muscles and increase her flexibility. Today, she can do back bends and headstands.

"It didn't come easy," she says. "It's taken 4 years. It wasn't hard to be dedicated, because I was in so much pain. I was willing to do anything to stop it. My instructor says the most motivated student is the one who wants to move out of pain and into freedom. I'm a living example."

Second Opinion

After three failed back surgeries, Simonik can hardly be blamed for not having another. "I tell my patients to try anything and everything before they resort to an operation," says Noah S. Finkel, MD, an orthopedic surgeon in Huntington, NY, and spokesperson for the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. "The reason she got better was probably because her therapist helped break down all the scar tissue she had and stretched out the cramped ligaments around her spine. The exercises then helped her rehab her muscles and stabilize her pelvis." Finkel says a variety of therapies, including chiropractic and deep-tissue massage, may help back surgery candidates avoid an operation.



For More information on this story, and to see the video of the morning show, see www.nmm.org, www.kathysimonik.com, www.Yogawerks.com. www.anusara.com.