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Minimally Invasive Choices for Back Pain Relief

If you're experiencing back pain, you're certainly not alone. Ranging in severity from a muscle ache to a shooting pain radiating down the leg, back pain is one of the most common reasons that people visit their healthcare provider. A study conducted by the Georgetown University Health Policy Institute reports that "some 16 million adults - 8 percent of all adults - experience persistent or chronic back pain, and as a result are limited in certain everyday activities."

Over time, these limitations can restrict our

capacity to interact physically, socially and emotionally, causing frustration and sometimes even depression.

"Back pain need not be something you just have to 'live with,'" says Dr. David Lloyd, neuroradiologist with Dignity Health, Yavapai Regional Medical Center and Vascular and Interventional Specialists of Prescott. "The vast majority of cases of back pain are treatable. Sometimes patience is required, but we have many tools at our disposal to help you feel healthier and more comfortable."

A neuroradiologist is a physician who is also a radiologist, specially trained in imaging such as MRI and CAT scan. This imaging is frequently

necessary to properly diagnose the cause of your back pain and to best plan how to treat it.

Causes of back pain are extensive, but most commonly include degenerative disc disease, arthritis, compressed nerves, and even fractures. Lloyd stresses that depending on the diagnosis, there are many minimally invasive choices when it comes to relieving the pain.

"Minimally invasive refers to procedures outside of what we typically think of as surgery," he explains. "It does not require general anesthesia, avoids large incisions, and the recovery is much more tolerable. In almost all cases, the patient requires no inpatient stay at the hospital and is back to performing

normal activities of daily living within a few hours of the procedure."

Steroid injections, epidural steroid injections and selective nerve blocks are among the most typical procedures.

For compression fractures of the spine, which are most often found in osteoporosis patients, vertebroplasty is a highly effective procedure. A cement-like material is injected into the broken bone, stabilizing the fracture. Lloyd states that most patients experience pain relief and the renewed ability to go about their daily activities almost immediately.

"The wonderful thing about the procedures I perform is how quickly and effectively most pa-



tients receive pain relief," Lloyd says. "Obviously, magic pills don't exist, and relief of back pain can remain elusive, but most patients receive a significantly improved quality of life shortly after receiving the needed procedure. It's very satisfying to see a patient who was struggling with unrelenting pain be able to engage in a more fulfilling lifestyle and

overcome the discouragement he or she was feeling."

Talk to your healthcare provider to see if a referral makes sense for you. Vascular and Interventional Specialists of Prescott may be reached at (928) 771-8477. ■

*Submitted by
Yavapai Regional
Medical Center*

For Amazing Physical and Mental Health Benefits, Hit the Trail on a Bike!



There is an inescapable, child-like joy that comes from riding a bike over dramatic high desert landscapes, or through forests of towering pines, on one of Prescott's many and varied trails. The good news is that you don't have to be a pro to join the fun. In fact, whether you are seven or 70, a novice or seasoned cyclist, there's a ride for you in the 250 miles of trails that wind in and around Prescott. The physical benefits of trail riding have been extensively documented, and new research suggests that mountain biking can also keep you healthy in spirit

and mind.

Ximena Florez, President of the Board of the Prescott Mountain Bike Alliance (PMBA), can't contain her enthusiasm for mountain biking.

"It's fun, it can be social (or solo), and it keeps you smiling and feeling young. There are so many benefits, including physical fitness and mental health. I think trail riding is also a form of meditation, because when you ride, you need to keep your focus on the trail."

Ximena emphasizes that a great variety of people can, and do, enjoy mountain biking. "Almost anyone can ride, espe-

cially in Prescott, because our focus at PMBA is on advocating for diverse types of trails that appeal to people of all ages and abilities. Over 100 miles of trails have been added in the Prescott area since PMBA's inception, 10 years ago. There is something for everyone. Examples include the trails at Pioneer Park for beginners, Thumb Butte and Spence Basin for intermediate riders, and the Dells for experienced cyclists. PMBA is continually raising funds for trail maintenance and expansion through its membership program."

Physical Strength, Fitness and More

The physical benefits of cycling in the great outdoors are well documented and include:

- Riding a bike over varied terrain builds strength and stamina throughout the body, including arm, back, and core muscles.
- Balance and coordination improve quickly

on a mountain bike.

- Cycling puts less stress on joints than many other forms of weight-bearing exercise.
- Exposure to natural, bright light can improve sleep by stimulating the production and timely release of melatonin, a hormone that regulates wake and sleep cycles.
- Exposure to sun, even for just 5-10 minutes (without sunscreen) creates vitamin D, which is important not only for bones, but for the immune system as well. In fact, the World Health Organization estimates that a large number of diseases, including autoimmune conditions, some types of cancer, and osteoporosis may be linked with too little exposure to natural light and sun.
- Getting dirty (which is always part of the fun of mountain biking) might also have benefits. Significant research demonstrates that regular exposure to natural

soil (i.e., dirt) supports a healthy microbiome: the collective bacteria living in and on us that support health in countless ways.

Improved Focus, Resiliency and Mood

Research on the mental health benefits of mountain biking is relatively new and really exciting. For example, an ongoing study funded by Specialized Bikes demonstrates significant benefits for kids with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

In 2012, Mike Sinyard, Founder and CEO of Specialized Bikes partnered with Stanford Medical School and RTSG Neuroscience Consultants to conduct research on riding and brain function. Along with improved outcomes in school, kids that participate in this ongoing study also report improved mood and a greater ability to focus on activities outside of school. While any kind of physical activity can help

with grades and mood, the skills developed through mountain biking seem to build additional layers of confidence, focus, and resilience.

Additional research includes:

- Work done by NICA, the National Interscholastic Cycling Association, which uses mountain biking to teach essential life skills to youngsters. NICA research shows that kids who ride on a regular basis build resiliency and self-esteem. In a team sport where no one sits on the bench, kids also learn teamwork, camaraderie, consideration, and a host of other advanced social skills.
- A Scottish study, examining the benefits of mountain biking for people struggling with a variety of mental health issues.

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