

THE BROOKINGS REGISTER

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X marks the spot

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Excruciating back pain restricted Boyd Landsman to remaining “flat on his back” for four months last year.

The 76-year old Lake Benton, Minn., resident is now looking forward to spring weather for golfing and going out dancing with his wife, Donna.

The Landsmans credit the X-STOP procedure conducted by Dr. Walter Carlson of the Orthopedic Institute for the turnaround.

X-STOP is the trademarked name for a nonfusion surgical implant used in treating lumbar - or lower back - spinal stenosis, which can cause horrific pain for sufferers.



Dr. Walter Carlson of the Orthopedic Institute (left) gives Lake Benton resident Boyd Landsman the OK to return to the Tylerm Minn., golf course for part-time groundskeeper work and a few rounds of golf. Landsman missed four months of his job and hobby with severe back pain before receiving the X-STOP procedure in October 2007. Register photo by Ashley Allgaier.

The device, relatively new to the region but USDA approved since 2005, is giving new hope - and real relief - to thousands. It's implanted in a relatively simple procedure that's a far cry from the more invasive and extensive back surgeries of the past.

A college football injury from the '50s and more than 45 years of farming combined to create a back problem for Landsman. He always figured he would have to undergo a back surgery at some point in his life but wasn't in any rush to go through the procedures then used.

Most recently, six years of mowing the Tyler golf course misaligned his spine to the point where the nerve was pinched.

Landsman had acquired spinal stenosis, a narrowing of the spinal canal, the gradual result of aging and wear-and-tear on the spine. When he was upright, his spine compressed nerves, and that created pain signals.

From June to October 2007 Landsman had to remain lying down, either in bed or on the sofa; the avid golfer was forced to watch the season slip away.

He was prescribed pain pills but was unable to keep them down. Physical therapy wasn't producing results, either.

Landsman consulted Carlson, whose Orthopedic Institute has offices in Brookings and Sioux Falls, and the surgeon recommended the new procedure. Although the operation was scheduled for Sioux Falls, Carlson routinely performs the procedure at the Brookings hospital.

In October, Landsman had the X-STOP surgery, which involves placing the implant as a spacer between the vertebrae of the spine, taking pressure off the nerve. It took about 90 minutes in surgery to place two X-STOP implants.

The implant itself isn't positioned close to the nerve or the spinal cord but rather behind the spinal cord between the bony spinous processes (the stubby, finger-like bones protruding from each vertebra).

Orthopedic surgeons like Carlson have inserted more than than 11,000 X-STOP implants in the past three years.

“It feels good - I had almost instant relief,” Landsman said. Within a few days he was mobile, but he still has a little trouble walking long distances or standing for an extended period of time.

“I think time will take care of that. It’s nothing like the constant pain,” he said.

Landsman undergoes daily therapy and workouts - an excuse to have coffee with his buddies, his wife added.

Donna notices that Boyd now stands straight when he walks instead of bent forward in pain.

“We were going to go to a dance Friday, but I had to work,” she said. The couple has taken on part-time jobs to stay active.

“It’s more fun helping others,” Donna said. “Retirement is boring. I don’t know what those people do all day.” She is the morning cook at a nearby healthcare system, which means early hours on Saturdays.

Unlike her husband, Donna prefers summer days on the lake instead of the golf course. She enjoys fishing with the “neighbor lady.”

Whether for work or play, Boyd can usually be found at the Tyler golf course.

There he has a part-time job as the groundskeeper, maintaining the course or taking on the “fix-it” odd jobs.

The Landsmans met with Carlson last Wednesday at the Orthopedic Institute’s Brookings office, and Boyd got the answer he had hoped for. Landsman can return to the golf course for work and rounds of golf, “but in reasonable moderation,” the doctor warned.