

Intro: People with back pain will try just about any solution to make the ouch go away and often that means surgery. In Today's Healthy Wealthy and Wise CBS2's Dr. Holly Phillips talks with a back surgeon who has a surprising perspective on going under the knife.

Holly Phillips: Back injuries often lead to surgery, the most common of which is called spinal fusion. There are about 300,000 of those surgeries in the US every year, and the surgeon with me today thinks many of those could have been avoided. Dr. Nathaniel Tindel, the director of the New York Center for Spinal Disorders and he's also the author of "I've got your back: the truth about spine surgery straight from a surgeon".

Dr. Holly Phillips: Welcome.

Dr. Tindel: Thank you for having me.

Dr. Holly Phillips: So I know a lot of surgeons and most of them are very gung-ho about surgery. Why do you feel the way that you do?

Dr. Tindel: Well I think there's a time and place for surgery and surgery works well for many conditions, but when you're trying to cure back pain the results of surgery aren't so predictable. And it amazes me how many people come to see me on a daily basis who have back pain and some of them have serious problems but haven't tried some simple cures, some simple alternative or conservative treatments.

Dr. Holly Phillips: And for patients with back injuries you suggest some very basic lifestyle changes; losing weight, reducing stress, and quitting that smoking. How do- how do each of these help?

Dr. Tindel: Well I like to start with Stress Management. Back pain isn't just about the back, it's also about your head and if you can reduce stress, the chances are you're also going to reduce that back pain that you have.

Dr. Holly Phillips: That makes good sense, what about the smoking?

Dr. Tindel: Well I'm sure you can tell me a million reasons to stop smoking, and I'm going to give you one more reason; it causes back pain, it actually leads to disc degeneration where the disc gets smaller and can cause serious back pain.

Dr. Holly Phillips: Mhmm, a recent study in the Journal of the American Medical Association showed that patients who have undergone herniated disc surgery were no better off in 2 years than people who opted to go with more conservative treatment. What kinds of conservative treatments do you recommend?

Dr. Tindel: Well the simplest one is exercise if you weigh the risks of having a surgical procedure versus the risks of doing some exercise, the answer's pretty simple; try the exercise first, and whether it's walking or water aerobics or yoga, it really doesn't matter as long as you get out there and get some exercise.

Dr. Holly Phillips: This has been marvellous information thank you so much for joining us.

Dr. Tindel: Thank you.

Dr. Holly Phillips: And that's today dose of Healthy Wealthy and Wise, I'm Dr. Holly Phillips.