

Standing By for Relief

Sitting was painful for Oscar Manuel until he had spine surgery at Fort Sanders Regional

For most of us, sitting down is a simple thing to do. For people who suffer from sciatic nerve pain, it is often uncomfortable and even excruciating.

Oscar Manuel suffered for six months before finally undergoing a spine procedure at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center. His only regret is that he didn't have the surgery sooner.

"I don't have sciatic nerve pain at all now," Manuel says. "It only took 40 minutes, and I seriously was in no pain from then on. Why in the world did I not consider surgery before?"

The Search for a Solution

Like many people, Oscar Manuel had simply adapted to his pain. He could play tennis, reaching and stretching his spine, but the drive to and from the tennis court was painful.

Manuel began going to restaurants where he could stand at a counter while eating. In church, he stood at the back of the classroom during Sunday School, pressing his hip into the edge of a pew for relief.

"I have never been out of church that much in my life," Manuel says. "I had a lot of people praying for me."

Getting a good night's sleep required a muscle relaxer in an amount so strong he began to have hallucinations. Manuel spent six months in physi-



After spine surgery at Fort Sanders Regional, Oscar Manuel is able to make the most of time with his family, including his first great-granddaughter.

cal therapy. He tried traction, dry needling and chiropractic care.

Still, pain shot down his right thigh to his knee, through his calf, jumped to his ankle, across his foot and to his big toe. It was so bad that at times his ankle felt broken.

Manuel just couldn't seem to find real relief, no matter how hard he tried.

"I felt like I was doing what I could do," Manuel says. "I had ruled out surgery. I just didn't even consider it."

Relief at Last

When Manuel read the full report from an MRI, he

began to understand more clearly where his pain was coming from. It was the first time surgery seemed like it might not be a bad idea.

"The very last two lines on that MRI said the conclusion was foraminal stenosis -- pressure on the nerve root," Manuel says, "but they said a cyst was putting pressure at the head of the nerve root. At that point I thought, 'something's got to be done with this cyst.'"

A retired pharmacist, Manuel contacted friends who knew medicine. All of them recommended Fort Sanders Regional neurosurgeon Joel Norman, MD.

There were also people telling him he shouldn't have the surgery, but Manuel says, "I knew what I had been through and if it didn't work



Oscar Manuel snaps a selfie after mowing the lawn, a chore he's happy he can do now that the pain from his compressed nerve is finally gone.

I didn't think it could be a whole lot worse than what I'd been through already."

In September 2019, he heard something that floored him: Dr. Norman would likely be able to make the pain go away with a surgical procedure that would take about an hour.

"I just cried to hear those words," Manuel says. "I can almost cry just telling about it."

The surgery was over within 40 minutes, and Manuel was on his feet before the day was over. Today, he can push a lawnmower and push his great-granddaughter's stroller without pain.

As exciting as it is to be

fully active, Manuel is most happy that he's simply able to take a seat.

"It was a while before I could sit without crying—it felt so good," Manuel says. "Going that long without being able to sit comfortably, it was depressing, to say the least!"

Manuel praises Dr. Norman's skill, and he's grateful for the compassion of the surgeon's team.

"I just wish I hadn't waited so long!" he says. "I hope other people will come to him sooner than I did."

To learn more about spine surgery at Fort Sanders Regional, visit fsregional.com/spine or call (865) 331-2835.



"I'll never get over this," says Oscar Manuel after his life-changing surgery. "I won't quit being thankful."

Getting on Your Nerves

Sometimes there's a problem with your back, even when your back may seem like the least of your problems.

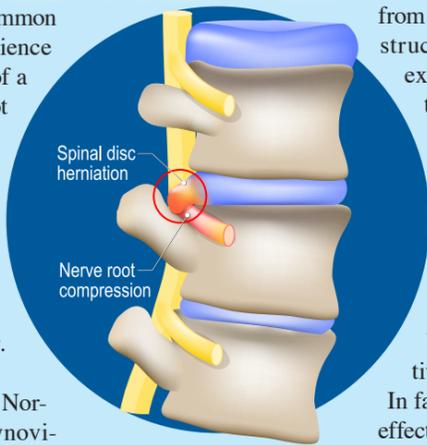
Oscar Manuel had extreme pain in his leg, ankle and foot, but it was all coming from a compressed nerve in his spine. Surgery at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center restored his quality of life all the way down to his toes.

"It only took 40 minutes, and I seriously was in no pain from then on," Manuel says. "Why in the world did I not consider surgery before?"

Fort Sanders Regional neurosurgeon Joel Nor-

man, MD, says it's common for patients to experience pain along the path of a compressed nerve root in the lower back. "Typically, nerve compression does not cause significant back pain, and in general we do not operate for isolated low back pain," Dr. Norman says.

According to Dr. Norman, part of the synovium (cushioning) between Manuel's spinal joints had developed a small defect that extended outside the joint boundaries. The synovial cyst projected into the spinal canal, causing nerve



compression.

"I was able to perform a simple decompressive procedure to remove a portion of the back part of the lumbar spine called the

lamina, only on the right side, and carefully dissect this compressive cyst away from the underlying neural structures," Dr. Norman explains. He removed the entire cyst so that the nerve root was no longer compressed. Dr. Norman says that surgery isn't the answer for everyone, but for those who qualify, it can be a safe and effective path to pain relief. In fact, it's safer and more effective than ever before.

"While many of the spinal procedures being performed are essentially the same as they have been for many years, advances in technology have now allowed the same type of

decompressive or fusion procedures to be performed with much smaller incisions," Dr. Norman says. "This can lead to a much shorter recovery time and a shorter stay in the hospital. Lumbar decompressive surgeries can often be performed as an outpatient procedure."

The Sciatic Nerve

The sciatic nerve is actually a combination of five nerves in the lower back and hips. It follows a path through the buttock, down the back of the thigh, the lower leg and into the foot. For many patients, sciatic pain (sciatica) gets better with time and treatments like physical therapy. In some cases, only surgery

can solve the problem.

When to see your doctor:

- If your sciatic pain gets worse
- If the pain comes back after treatment
- If you lose feeling in your leg
- If your leg becomes weak
- If there is a problem with your bowels or bladder
- If you have a high fever
- If you have a history of cancer

When alternative methods and medication don't work, see your doctor about a referral to find out if spine surgery at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center is right for you. To learn more, visit fsregional.com/spine or call (865) 331-2835.



REGIONAL EXCELLENCE.

With more than 250 physicians on the active staff at Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center, we provide the community with the most comprehensive specialty and primary care available.