

New mild[®] Procedure for Lumbar Spinal Stenosis

As we age, we begin to understand just how important it is to take good care of our bodies. One area that often degenerates is our spines, which can lead to lumbar spinal stenosis (LSS). This medical condition happens when the spinal canal narrows and compresses the spinal cord and the nerves of the lumbar vertebra. These five large vertebrae between the ribs and the pelvis permit movement and serve as the primary support for the weight of our bodies.

Thankfully, doctors have developed a minimally invasive treatment for lumbar spinal stenosis that lessens the pain. Cleveland Clinic's Department of Pain Management offers this minimally invasive outpatient treatment for moderate-to-severe lumbar spinal stenosis. It is called the *mild*[®] procedure for minimally invasive lumbar decompression.

"This state-of-the-art technique decreases pain and increases mobility while maintaining the stability of the spine," explains Nagy Mekhail, MD, PhD, of Cleveland Clinic's Department of Pain Management and leader of the *mild*[®] program.

More on LSS

LSS is a painful condition that can greatly affect patients' quality of life, Dr. Mekhail says. It causes low back or leg pain and limits a person's ability to stand and walk. This is because when the patient stands or walks, the spinal canal narrows even more. Patients who have moderate-to-severe LSS often cannot stand longer than 5 minutes or walk farther than 300 feet. The average age of patients seeking treatment for LSS is 73, and it is diagnosed by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

Many patients who undergo the procedure are able to get back to activities such as grocery shopping or golf, Dr. Mekhail says—and it's not uncommon for them to progress to walking at least a mile without having to stop.

Treatment options

Nonsurgical treatment for LSS includes nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), physical therapy, and/or epidural injections to relieve inflammation and swelling. However, these treatments are effective only in a small percentage of patients, and if they do work, the effect is not always sustained.

Some patients who have LSS can benefit from open spine surgery in which part of the spine is removed to relieve some of the pressure in the spinal canal. Not all patients are candidates for open spine surgery, especially older patients with other conditions. Patients who have not responded to these treatments and those who are not candidates for open spine surgery could potentially benefit from *mild*[®].

The procedure

The *mild*[®] procedure is performed under deep sedation through a 1-centimeter incision, says Dr. Mekhail, who has been performing the surgery for three years. The clinician uses a small tool to go into the bone to remove ligament tissue and widen the spinal canal to decrease the nerve compression.

Patients typically recover quickly and have no complications. They are able to walk within 24 hours and are encouraged to walk regularly and/or participate in physical therapy. After a few years of performing this

procedure, Dr. Mekhail and colleagues have found that patients report a significant reduction in pain in the long-term following the procedure.

With more than 10,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 years old every day, Dr. Mekhail says that more patients are seeking innovative treatments such as *mild* that will allow them to stay active and maintain their quality of life. And the good news is that Medicare began covering *mild* in July 2012.

Dr. Mekhail sees patients at main campus for a variety of pain management conditions. To make an appointment with Dr. Mekhail, call 216.444.PAIN (7246).

For more information about Cleveland Clinic's Department of Pain Management visit clevelandclinic.org/painmanagement.

Olympic Athlete's Pain Is Conquered with mild® Procedure

For Olympic athlete Nagui Asaad Youssef, a newer less invasive spine surgery gave him back his life. He had been dealing with the progressive pain of lumbar spinal stenosis (LSS) since the year 2000, and began having debilitating back pain in 2008.

Mr. Youssef, 67, is a former international-level track and field athlete from Egypt who today serves as a professional coach for the national Egyptian track and field teams. A few years ago, he was having more pain management procedures, including epidural injections, physical therapy and massage, to try to manage the progressing pain. But as his condition worsened, these treatments began to diminish in their therapeutic relief.

"The pain created limitations in my coaching role as well as my time with my wife and grandchildren," he says. "I would say I was in agonizing pain for the last 18 months before I had the spine procedure."

When Youssef learned about minimally invasive lumbar decompression – known as the *mild*® procedure – at Cleveland Clinic, he traveled from Egypt to the United States to visit his daughter and have his case assessed by Nagy Mekhail, MD, PhD.

Using the *mild*® procedure, Dr. Mekhail makes a small incision and uses a tool to go into the bone to remove ligament tissue and widen the spinal canal and decrease the nerve compression. Mr. Youssef was especially surprised to learn that *mild* is an outpatient surgery and does not require any post-operative physical therapy.

By the time Mr. Youssef came to Cleveland Clinic for surgery in 2009, his walking was limited and he had to sit after just 5 minutes of standing. For an athlete and active person, these symptoms were discouraging to say the least. On the day of the surgery, he arrived at Cleveland Clinic at 7 a.m. to have the *mild* procedure performed by Dr. Mekhail, and he was discharged at noon that same day.

"I was so thrilled waking up in the post-operative recovery unit because I was able to move my legs," he says. "And within a few days of the surgery I was able to walk for four miles without any pain."

Now, he is back to his active role with family and his coaching responsibilities, and he is able to play with his grandchildren and grocery shop with his wife.

Says Mr. Youssef, "I feel that my life clock has been rewound to before the year 2000 when the pain started."