

## Relief for the Aching Back

If you have been bothered by back pain, you are not alone. According to the National Pain Foundation, after headache, backache is the most commonly reported painful condition, affecting up to 50 percent of working age Americans. And back pain is more than a nuisance; in chronic cases, it can negatively impact quality of life, the ability to work and even personal relationships.

The bad news is that back pain can occur for any number of reasons. Because the exact cause of pain can involve soft tissue, bone, disc or nerves, reaching a diagnosis is often difficult. Primary care physicians are knowledgeable about a wide range of diseases, but are usually not experienced in complicated musculoskeletal diagnoses.

The good news is that help is available. If you have experienced back pain for a week or more, your current treatment is not working, or if your pain is getting worse, it's probably time to see a pain specialist.

Dr. David Gale, a pain management physician at the Georgia Pain Clinic, sees the benefits of pain management as two-fold: not only can the patient be provided with quick, effective pain relief, but some pain management techniques also help to identify sources of pain not evident using traditional diagnostic methods.

With locations in Marietta, Cartersville and Woodstock, the Georgia Pain Clinic offers comprehensive pain management to patients with back pain and other painful conditions. Furthermore, the clinic is associated with the new WellStar Pain Management and Spine Treatment Center at Kennestone Hospital, a fully accredited state-of-the-art facility.

"WellStar's Pain Management and Spine Treatment Center is where we perform the majority of our more complex procedures," Gale says. "This center was co-developed by WellStar and the Georgia Pain Clinic last year and is a huge success. Georgia Pain Clinic physicians are the only doctors who have access to the WellStar Center."

All five physicians on staff at the Georgia Pain Clinic are anesthesiologists, trained in pain relief for patients undergoing surgery. Many of the techniques used to make surgery painless can be expanded to relieve other types of pain, and anesthesiology is the most common specialty among board certified pain management physicians.

In contrast to orthopedic surgery, most pain management treatments are minimally invasive and can be performed on an outpatient basis, requiring little down time. The Georgia Pain Clinic offers an array of procedures for spine problems, with injection procedures being the most common. Using C-arm fluoroscopy, an advanced x-ray technology, the physicians are able to guide a needle into the exact location for treatment.

Epidural steroid injections are frequently used to treat inflammation and pain associated with disc problems. Injection into the facet joints, another common procedure, is used for both pain relief and in locating the source of pain. Once the source is located, Gale says, radiofrequency lesioning provides long-lasting improvement in up to 80 percent of treated patients.

Because back pain has numerous causes, treatment must be tailored to the patient. After diagnosis, the pain management specialist takes on a consultant role, determining if the nature of the problem further lends itself

to chiropractic or orthopedic treatment. “I would say that only 10 to 12 percent of patients end up needing orthopedic surgery,” Gale notes.

Not surprisingly, pain management includes attention to psychological distress, which can interfere with treatment and rehabilitation. Studies have shown that the longer a person is disabled due to back pain, the less likely he is to return to work and an active life. The goal of the Georgia Pain Clinic is to help patients regain functional status as quickly as possible.

If you have persistent back pain, discuss with your primary care physician whether a referral to a pain management specialist might be appropriate for you.

For more information about Georgia Pain Clinic call 770-590-1078.

*Jill Taylor*