Spine Surgery Success

Active Patient Regains Her Life

By: Sandra Lodan

Pre- and post-surgery scans of Kristen Martinez's neck. Dr. Etebar removed an intervertebral disc to access the compressed neural structures and relieved the pressure by removing the herniated disc that was causing the compression. He then placed a bone graft between the adjacent vertebrae. The final step was to insert metal plates for extra support and stability to help ensure proper fusion.

Kristen Martinez and her husband have a blended family that includes five active children ages 11 and younger. The successful local business owner has played sports her entire life, including collegiate volleyball.

Three years ago, Martinez hurt her neck while playing "horse" with one of her sons. She tried to put the injury out of her mind and go on with her busy life despite the progressively worsening pain, weakness and numbness in her arms and hands. That changed, however, when Martinez and her sister, also a former college volleyball player, challenged each other to a game of beach volleyball during a family vacation in San Diego last August. Before she knew it, Martinez had collapsed on the sand in agony

An MRI at Eisenhower Medical Center revealed a large herniated disc in Martinez's neck that was compressing and inflaming a nerve root, causing a condition medically defined as cervical radiculopathy — commonly called a pinched nerve.

Diligent research and multiple referrals led Martinez to Shahin Etebar, MD, a Board Certified Neurosurgeon specializing in the correction of spinal deformity and adult degenerative scoliosis; spinal reconstruction due to failed surgery, cancer, and trauma; diagnosis and treatment of brain disorders and tumors and minimally invasive spinal surgery. Complex spine cases represent approximately 95 percent of Dr. Etebar's work.

After ruling out more conservative modalities such as medication, a cervical collar or pillow, physical therapy or epidural steroid injections, Dr. Etebar determined the most effective treatment option for Martinez would be an anterior cervical discectomy with fusion, a surgical procedure to relieve nerve root compression that is one of the most common and successful types of spine surgery.

Martinez's surgery was scheduled for September 2012. The procedure involved making a small incision near the front of her neck. Dr. Etebar then removed her intervertebral disc to access the compressed neural structures and relieved the pressure by removing the herniated disc that was causing the compression. He then placed a bone graft between the adjacent vertebrae. The final step was to insert metal plates for extra support and stability to help ensure proper fusion.

"From the beginning, Dr. Etebar and his team were great — very professional, caring, attentive and detail-oriented," Martinez raves. "He took the time to explain everything to my family and me and to address all of our questions and concerns. After the surgery, Dr. Etebar visited me every day in the hospital."

"The surgery was a total success," continues Martinez. "The day after surgery, the pain was gone and the feeling was already returning. I'm especially pleased about how minimal the scar on my neck is."

By Thanksgiving, Martinez reported feeling great and was functioning at 95 percent of her normal activity.

"Our team includes fellowship-trained neurosurgeons working in collaboration with a team of highly trained professionals — all dedicated to providing the desert community with the highest quality of spine care, using the latest technology and the least invasive techniques," explains Dr. Etebar, who is also President of Eisenhower's Medical Staff.

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