

My name is Lori and this is my testimonial regarding the life changing experience that Dr. Bitan and the disc replacement surgery that he performed saved me from the debilitating pain I was trapped in.

My sister and I have suffered from scoliosis since adolescence and, while her back problems are much more involved based on the number of surgeries and treatments she has endured, our mutual affliction has had, at times, devastating effects on our lives.

Roughly six years ago, I underwent an I-Det procedure to re-inflate a collapsed disc and I enjoyed four years of minor and sporadic back pain after the procedure. In March of '06 the chronic disintegration of my discs flared again and my search for treatment began.

The pain was constant and at times, unbearable. My life was directed by the limits of my capacity to manage my discomfort. Sitting, standing, lifting, all of the minor tasks of managing my life as a single working mother became major tasks. The frustration I felt was unrelenting and the pain became nothing short of a 500 lb. gorilla I was forced to carry with me all day, everyday. For me, based on some reason not even entirely understood by Dr. Bitan, eating to satiation inflamed my discomfort. My social life was greatly curbed-even family dinners at holidays became points of friction as I knew what my body was saying and enjoying a meal painstakingly prepared for the celebration couldn't be enjoyed. I understood the disappointment of the chef but that didn't out way the suffering I knew I was in for if I indulged, not even over indulged. Over the counter pain relievers did little to assuage the discomfort.

I, like many other patients with back problems, attempted a variety of treatments which included physical therapy, steroid injections, acupuncture, and prescription pain medication. Unfortunately, the medical treatment I pursued involved, in no small part, me convincing the physicians that I knew my body and that the pain I was feeling was not warranted or "in my head". Apparently ego has more to do with treatment recommendations than listening to the information conveyed by a patient. I would strongly urge you to trust the signals of your body and not accept the limitations of your medical care. Had I not pursued this to its end, I would have been sentenced to a lifetime of pain management, not a lifetime of living.

After having committed to pursuing a more complete treatment, I endeavored into Manhattan to consult with the doctor who treated my sister as an adolescent. The agonizing frustration that I felt seemed insurmountable as I waited months to see him, only to be informed that he couldn't help me (and I appreciate his recommendation-see ego comment above). It felt like getting cast out in agony onto the cold concrete of NYC was of no consequence to anyone who had the power to help me. As an adult, I understand and empathize with any patients who struggle to get the attention and treatment they desperately need for themselves or their family in the sterile, broken health care system of this country. I needed someone to treat me, not score my co-pay and send me on my way, no closer to relief than I was months earlier when I made the appointment.

It was at this time, I was referred to Dr. Bitan and scheduled an appointment. Many hours were spent scouring the internet on medical options. I schooled myself on the disc replacement procedure. It seemed radical, but I would have given anything to be free of this consuming pain.

My initial meeting with Dr. Bitan was informative, but for some of the reasons outlined above, he seemed hesitant to accept me for the procedure. I went for a discogram, which was fouled up and had to return for another in Manhattan. All this while, the agony continued and the pain became, in a strange way a companion. I finally returned for my next consultation with Dr. Bitan with the results of the discogram and felt the reoccurring disappointment that he was not convinced that I was a candidate for this procedure. He, to his credit, wanted to review all of the MRI's, tests, etc before he made his decision. After a long trip back to Long Island, he called and had his answer. My fiancée turned around and drove back to the city and were rewarded with good news he would perform the procedure. My spine needed more than a single replacement and the complication that I would also need a simultaneous fusion made the decision for him a difficult one.

Although the pain never subsided, the relief that some treatment, any treatment, was in sight made the time before the surgery bearable. Although it sounds corny, if you can empathize with the constant pain of chronic back problems, it felt like Christmas in January.

The pre-op tests came off without a hitch. And finally on Valentines day, we went into Lenox Hill. Anticipation that I would wake up and be on the road to being pain free made me practically giddy.

I awoke in a drug induced haze and was in post op. The nurses were wonderful. Because of my multiple procedure of disc replacement and simultaneous fusion, I had a long incision on my abdomen as well as two on my back. This led me into a slightly different post-operative recuperation than most patients only having one of these procedures. The healing process was like Dr. Doolittles llama, the push-me pull-you. Sitting was relief for one of the procedures while aggravating the other and standing caused relief for the latter. Moderation of both positions resulted in a satisfactory compromise. This is a side bar to the ultimate testimonial, but I felt thought worth noting.

Without gory details, the hospital recuperation lasted several days. To my surprise, they insisted I get up and on my feet the day after the procedure. This is a small piece of advice that I may offer- move as much as you can bear. Slow walking, although I felt like a zombie from a bad black and white horror movie with my deliberate gait, made a huge gain in my recuperation both at the hospital and at home. It seemed counter intuitive to me, a piece of me had been replaced with a chunk of metal and they wanted me to get up. As it turns out, I think this was not only for my back, but to counter a vicious side effect of the morphine. Not to get graphic, but expect to be constipated. Severely.

Upon my release, I agonized over traveling the beautifully paved NYC roadways. Needless to say, I carefully timed my medication to coincide with the ride home. It turned out to be not as painful as I had imagined. It is best that address pain at this time because this was when I began to feel not a small amount of doubt regarding my decision to replace part of my spine. I was in a lot of pain from not only the incisions, but the actual removal of the destroyed disc required some manual labor on the part of Dr. Bitan, resulting in some further nerve aggravation. Point being, expect it to get worse before it gets better.

Once home, I was incapacitated, taking short walking jaunts every hour for a week or so. Fatigue, constipation, trying not to take the morphine, and lingering doubt made that first week unpleasant, but the relief of being home began to change my mood. I found it odd that through all the surveys I took from almost every doctor, that they seemed to concentrate on my mental state. It makes a lot more sense now as my attitude and support systems made this time in particular bearable. As I said before, I would have given anything to evict that gorilla and I meant it. The doubt I felt because of the overall condition I was in was kept in check thanks to the support of my family. It is extremely important to give yourself time to feel better. Like I said, it will get worse before it gets better. I should also note that the drugs can have a significant effect on your clear thought. This should be anticipated.

After several weeks, I could walk for longer and longer times-about 15 minutes after three weeks. I quickly weaned myself off the commercial painkillers-probably earlier than I should have, but that was my own choice. Gradually the fog cleared and the incisions healed. At that point, it was matter of time, movement and gingerly testing my new "bionic" back. Then, and in fact to this day a year later, heavy lifting was out of the question. I could begin to return to somewhat normal activities. My six week check up went perfectly and Dr. Bitan seemed genuinely impressed with my progress. It was at this time he had expressed something I found endearing and clarified the human element to medical care. He said to me how, when just before I went into the operating room, I had said to him that he had made the right decision (to perform the procedure on me) and that I couldn't be more ready to get going. At my check up he admitted how that simple expression of confidence galvanized his resolve for what he was about to do. I in no way am saying my pep talk affected his performance on that day, but what I will say is that a positive attitude can make a world of difference.

A year later I am still limited, perhaps mentally, with what I would say are normal activities. I do not lift anything heavier than a gallon of water, I can't sit longer than 30 minutes without moving. I will never jet ski, snowmobile, snow ski or sky dive. Quick contractions of my back (like in a haunted house at Halloween) are best to be avoided. This was determined the hard way. These are hardly life changing limitations, and pale in comparison to the overall quality of life I now enjoy. There are still days when some OTC painkillers are needed-like when I am on my feet for too long or sitting for extended times. I am also thrilled to report, I can enjoy food again. And not a moment too soon as my now husband got off for a year feeding me two pretzels and a couple of raisins for

dinner. I was the ultimate cheap date but have since rekindled my love affair with lobster.

Without question, the pursuit of this treatment has been a rigorous journey, but the payoff has proven to be a reprieve from a life of misery. I encourage you to be aggressive in your own pursuit of treatment.