

EMPOWERED HEALTH

Combined treatments get golf pro back swinging

Neural therapy regulates how nerves control muscles to reduce pain

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After he threw his back out, professional golfer Matt Stansfield sought the help of naturopath and family friend Jordan Atkinson.

Atkinson suggested neural therapy, which involves injecting local anesthetics or homeopathic preparations into the area being treated, such as organ tissue, nerves, muscles or joints. The idea is to numb the pain and reboot the membrane of the nerve tissue, and return nerve function to normal. It is most commonly used for back, neck and head pain, joint and muscle pain, post-surgical pain, whiplash and athletic injuries.

The objective is to regulate how the nerves control the muscles. "I'm a golf pro, so I need to fire through on my left side," Stansfield said. "When the muscles are too tense, I'm not able to do that."

Stansfield has been a PGA of Canada golf professional since 2005. He also runs StansfieldGolf.com, a website dedicated to golf news and advice. Stansfield has had back problems since a car accident in 2007.

"I had pretty severe soft tissue damage," Stansfield said. "I'm always going to have back issues."

In the early fall of 2012, he suffered a setback. "I was in the process of moving some things around my place when I picked up something and twisted, and that was enough to put my back out."

He ended up in emergency at Lions Gate Hospital. There, he was diagnosed with a herniated disc — a frequently

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painful condition in which a tear in an intervertebral disc allows the soft, central portion of the disc to bulge out beyond the damaged outer rings.

The doctor at the hospital recommended physio, which he was reluctant to try again.

"After the car accident I did physio, but because of how severe my soft tissue damage is, I need something a little deeper," Stansfield said. "Muscle stimulators don't really solve the issue."

Stansfield had seen Atkinson previously, for gastrointestinal issues.

"I didn't know that he did neural therapy," Stansfield said. "The only thing I knew was that he was a naturopath, and that it would be a more natural approach without a lot of medication being used. Within that first session I was able to start swinging again."

Dr. Paul Bishop, a spine specialist who works out of ICORD, the spinal cord injury research centre at Vancouver General Hospital, said that while he knows of no scientific evidence that



Golf pro Matt Stansfield, who has had back issues since a car accident in 2007, follows through on a shot at the Northview Golf and Country Club in Surrey.

neural therapy works for back injury or pain, he wouldn't discourage patients who want to try it, provided a doctor or specialist keeps an eye on it. He estimates he sees 70 to 80 patients a week.

"When it comes to neural therapy, I would say to a patient, 'I've examined you, you don't have any nerve damage, and the research on it is showing there are some people who feel that they benefit from it. If you feel you want to try it, go ahead.'"

"If a patient had nerve damage, and wanted to have neural therapy, then somebody — me or their family doctor or another specialist — should keep an eye on their nerve function to make

sure it's not worsening while they're undergoing treatment."

Stansfield said his family doctor is on board with the therapy "because he's been able to see the results."

Atkinson, a graduate of B.C.'s Boucher Institute of Naturopathic Medicine Training, also diagnosed a thoracic disc problem and sent Stansfield to a chiropractor for an adjustment.

"The combination of that and the neural therapy has been a really good one," Stansfield said. "He believes the neural therapy helps the chiropractic adjustments stay in place longer."

Neural therapy sessions usually last 20-30 minutes, or as many injections

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as are needed to relieve the pain. The needles are small and cause little discomfort.

On average, patients receive six to 10 treatments. Of the therapies Stansfield has tried, including physio and intramuscular stimulation, it is the least painful.

"When I got the herniated disc, I couldn't function, I couldn't run the website," Stansfield said. "I was basically flat-out in bed. Where I'm at now, I can work on my website, I can do all my daily activities without noticeable pain. Before, I couldn't walk for more than five or 10 minutes. Now I can go for an hour walk without noticeable pain. And in conjunction with working with a chiropractor, I'm able to swing a golf club again."

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