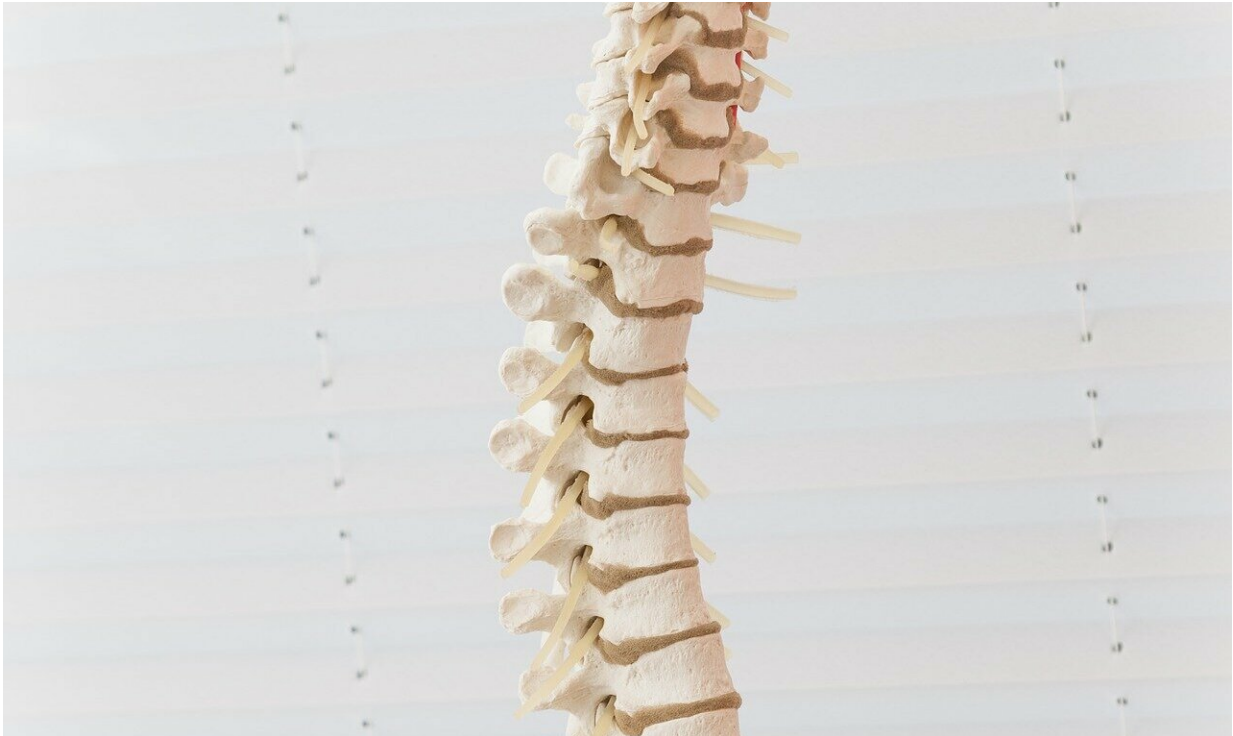


# When spine surgery is the answer

September 21 2021, by Deb Balzer

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Having a back injury can put a person's life on hold. While most people can find relief through nonsurgical methods like physical therapy, steroid injections and medication management, some patients, including those with spine disorders, may need surgical intervention.

Dr. Matthew Neal, a Mayo Clinic neurosurgeon who specializes in

minimally invasive spine surgery, says each patient's situation is unique. That's why what happens before surgery can be as important as what happens in the [operating room](#).

"We look at each patient, and we look for the least invasive way to address their problem," Dr. Neal says.

"We're using [virtual reality technology](#) and the latest cutting-edge technology to help us educate patients ahead of surgery. We're using it to plan for surgery. And we're also using it in the operating room to help us visualize structures and increase the safety of surgery."

Minimally invasive surgery spine surgery often falls into different categories.

"The goal of minimally invasive surgery is to minimize the damage to soft tissue around the spine. Most surgeries fall into one of three categories," Dr. Neal says. "The first category is decompression surgery."

"Another type of surgery that we do is called disc replacement surgery."

"The third type of surgery that we do is called spinal fusion surgery," Dr. Neals says. "With [spinal fusion surgery](#), we're trying to fix two or more bones together. To do this, we need to place most of the time, some type of instrumentation into the body. That includes rods, screws, plates and sometimes cages into the disk space to hold those bones together."

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