



Adam Lipson, M.D., of IGEA Brain and Spine, gave Weems an MRI. The results showed a severely herniated C5-6 disc that was compressing his spine. This new injury was in addition to two lumbar or back herniations. Lipson was surprised that Weems could still walk.

"It was an extremely scary experience when Dr. Lipson showed me the MRI..." Weems says. "If it would have snapped, I would have been paralyzed from the neck down."

Lipson performed an immediate anterior cervical disc replacement, and Weems came through the surgery like a champion.

"Literally, when I woke up from surgery, I had full feeling and range of motion. Everything was back. It was amazing." Within five days of surgery, Weems was able to drive his daughter out of state to tour colleges. Such an outcome is not uncommon.

According to Lipson, IGEA Brain and Spine enjoys a 90 percent success rate with the type of surgery Weems had. In fact, spine surgery has evolved so much in recent decades that it should no longer be considered as scary as it once was. Despite this, the stigma of paralysis, or surgery exacerbating back problems, remains. "There is a perception," says Lipson, "of poor outcomes, but the data show that is not the case. Outcomes are on par with joint replacements."

THE FINISH LINE

Several months post-surgery, Weems returned to his active lifestyle, including weightlifting. Unfortunately, his lower back pain worsened, and in April 2015, he and Lipson decided on a microdiscectomy. This would address the herniated disc that was not addressed during his previous surgery.

Again, Weems felt immediate relief following the procedure. "I had really been struggling with leg pain," he says, "and it was gone."

A few months after his final surgery, he went back to weightlifting, running, and biking. In 2016, he ran a half-marathon with his 18-year-old daughter. They crossed the finish line together at 2:15:07. Now he is training for a triathlon.

Salkin is also pain-free as of late but knows what he has to do to stay that way. "Having lived with back issues for so long, I know what I can and can't do," he explains.

He tries to start his days with a floor routine of stretching, core exercises, and pushups. "Having a strong core and avoiding weight gain are the keys to spine health," he says. "If I get lazy and don't do my routine, my back lets me know, and I get back on track."

THE ROAD BACK

A herniated disc can lead to immobility, but the latest treatments are getting people back on their feet faster **BY BOBBIE METEVIER**