

Capathia is a 38-year-old mother of two, who works as a phlebotomist. She's an active woman who participates fully in the lives of her children and needs steady hands to perform her job proficiently. One morning, a few months ago, Capathia woke up to find that her left hand felt numb. Assuming she'd slept on it in an odd way, she proceeded about her day, waiting for the numbness and tingling to fade. Instead, she found the sensation continued to worsen.

Capathia spoke with a physician colleague at work, who didn't like the sound of her symptoms. He referred her to an orthopedist who, after taking MRI images, discovered a

bulging disc in her neck. Capathia was sent straight to neurology. The neurologist told her he had no idea what had caused the disc to become inflamed, but that she needed surgery, and she needed it soon.

Without the surgery, he told her, she would likely lose all feeling in her hand—and possibly her ability to walk.

Capathia was terrified—of both the prospect of losing physical functions and of spinal surgery. Given her options, she scheduled the surgery. Then, her mother recommended she first be evaluated by her chiropractor, Dr. John Ballam, on the chance he could help. In fact, it was an evaluation that would dramatically change the course of Capathia's health care journey.

Dr. Ballam, owner of Legacy Chiropractic in Cary, uses a specific technique—the Gonstead Method—to evaluate and treat the body with precision and accuracy. He is an expert not only in diagnostics, but in comprehending the body as an ongoing story, each sentence influencing the progression of the complete and evolving tale.

INTRODUCTION TO CHIROPRACTIC

But before Dr. Ballam was a chiropractic expert he, like all practitioners, was a student. "I discovered chiropractic in undergraduate training," he recalls. "I knew I wanted to be in health care but wasn't sure what field I was really called to. At the time I was a psychology major while also taking pre-med courses. One day, a classmate invited me to a workshop given by her chiropractor. I went along, interested to learn about the field, and also about ergonomics.

"I knew almost nothing about chiropractic medicine, and went with the vague idea that a chiropractor was someone to be used as a last resort when traditional medicine had failed. I was surprised to find out the man giving the presentation was, in fact, a real health care professional. He was



(ABOVE) Dr. Ballam illustrates the use of a nervoscope to assess the presence of inflammation in the spine. (LEFT) Dr. Ballam points out areas of the spine that were misaligned for his patient, Capathia, prior to treatment with the Gonstead method.



Gonstead Method *Helps Active Mother Avoid Surgery*

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very well trained and knowledgeable about so many areas of health beyond how to simply address back or neck pain."

Following the presentation, attendees were invited to get a free chiropractic evaluation. Dr. Ballam remembers he was excited for the opportunity, and shocked by the outcome. "I was a young healthy guy," he says. "I wanted the evaluation as a learning experience, but figured I'd get a clean bill of health. It turns out in that very first evaluation the chiropractor discovered I had some arthritis in my spine and two congenitally fused bones in my neck! I wasn't experiencing any symptoms from these issues, but as he explained at the time, they were the sort of things that would cause pain later if not properly cared for now. He explained it well and it's always stuck with me," Dr. Ballam continues. "He said it's like dentistry; do you want to have your teeth checked while they're still generally healthy and prevent cavities from occurring, or wait until you need to have a tooth extracted?"

Dr. Ballam became a regular chiropractic patient, and says he started to notice he had more energy, his memory and concentration improved, and he even noticed his racing time improved without changing anything about his training as a runner.

"When I asked my chiropractor how it was I was seeing all these changes, he explained that when the body has mechanical misalignments—even those small enough to be pain-free—the nervous system's lines of communication get interrupted. When you fix those misalignments, the nervous system is better able to communicate and control the body with ease and efficiency.

"That was it," he says Dr. Ballam with a smile. "I was hooked. I enrolled in chiropractic school at Northwestern Health Sciences University in Minneapolis where I found a deep respect for this profession and a love of the Gonstead method."

THE GONSTEAD METHOD

Dr. Ballam agrees that "there are many

methods of chiropractic that could likely have made a positive difference in Capathia's story." But it was his specific expertise in the Gonstead method that completely changed her health journey, and perhaps the course of her life. "Capathia's first appointment with me revealed how scared she felt having been told she was facing spinal surgery or the potential loss of sensation in her legs and arm," Dr. Ballam recalls. "I was determined to help if I could.

"The Gonstead method uses five criteria for evaluation. First, I palpate the spine in two ways; one is static palpation—which is feeling the spine at rest. The second is palpating the spine in motion as the patient bends in various ways. Next is observation and measurement of the posture. For this I use a tool on an iPad that takes two images of the spine and allows me to overlay lines and take specific measurements to help determine areas of stress.

"A tool called a nervoscope follows, which allows me to assess for inflammation in the spine. This is a small hand-held tool that runs down the spine like two fingers, producing an infrared image indicating areas of inflammation. Lastly, I will take a full spine X-ray. Many times, an image of just the mid- and upper spine is taken, but it is vital to point out that the 'full spine' part of the X-ray is quite important, as demonstrated by Capathia's story."

Dr. Ballam did this complete assessment on Capathia's first visit, and he too observed the bulging disc in her neck. He also discovered some misalignment issues in Capathia's pelvis, at the very base of the spine.

"Capathia didn't have hip or back pain," Dr. Ballam says, "so the focus had only been on her neck. But from my assessment—using the tools described and my experience—I was fairly certain this issue in her pelvis was causing the disc issue in her neck. She agreed to let me work on correcting misalignments before her surgery. I never touched her neck. And that was it," he says with a smile. "Within two or three adjustments, the bulging disc resolved."

Capathia could not have been happier. The feeling in her hand returned, and a lifetime commitment to the art of chiropractic care was born. "I want people to understand what I didn't understand as a young college student," Dr. Ballam says. "Chiropractic care isn't just about fixing a problem once it is causing you pain. At its best, it is a means of self-care, of maintaining the body we stress physically, mentally, and emotionally every day to help prevent injuries from occurring."

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