



# IU Health Spine Program

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Conservative care and surgical treatments for  
spine and neck conditions



Indiana University Health

# Why choose the IU Health Spine Program?

Whether your patient is experiencing a spine or neck condition that can be treated through conservative care or an issue that requires surgery, the IU Health Spine Program is a trusted, experienced and comprehensive resource for accessing the entire spectrum of care to fit your patient's needs.

About 95% of spine and neck disorders can be treated by conservative measures like physical therapy and medications. In the IU Health Spine Program, our philosophy focuses on a targeted approach to care with the goal to clearly identify the source of your patient's discomfort and then deploy the least invasive means to achieve maximum symptom improvement. This tiered approach takes advantage of our imaging capabilities and extensive experience in this field to arrive at an accurate diagnosis for your patient.

At IU Health, your patients gain access to every aspect of total spine and neck care. Through our integrated approach, our rehabilitation experts coordinate seamlessly with our spine specialists to ensure those patients with more complex issues requiring surgery can benefit from this collaborative continuum of care.

With more spine specialists than any other provider in the state of Indiana, the IU Health Spine Program brings comprehensive and multidisciplinary care to your patients. We serve as a referral center for complicated cases from around the region, as our experts have the experience and training to successfully manage these cases. Our unique partnership with Indiana University School of Medicine means our physicians have a wealth of knowledge on the latest innovations and treatment options for spine and neck disorders. They are instructing the next generation of spine specialists and are involved in research that will shape spine care in the years to come.



## Treatment options

If you think of back pain like walking a path, patients begin their treatment journey at a trailhead with dozens of signs pointing all different directions. Spine and neck disorders are wide-ranging and incredibly variable depending on each person's anatomy and medical history. A herniated disc in one patient might not cause symptoms, whereas in another patient it might require surgery. This is why the IU Health Spine Program prioritizes finding an accurate diagnosis as soon as possible. This begins with a conservative, personalized approach to care.

With the IU Health Spine Program, you will have access to a nurse navigator to guide you through appointments and procedures, creating a seamless experience. The nurse navigator starts by helping you find the most appropriate provider within the spine program for an evaluation or a procedure. When that vital step is completed, the team also helps with booking initial appointments, coordinating after-care and follow-up appointments, and connecting patients and caregivers to educational and other resources along the way. Throughout the process, the nurse navigator serves as a liaison between patients, caregivers and providers to help you understand each step, know what is next, keep you informed of progress and ensure that your questions are answered.

### Conservative care options

Individualized care is central to treatment in the IU Health Spine Program. Our physicians take the time to listen to each patient's concerns and medical history, pursue the necessary imaging and discuss treatment options to arrive—with the patient—at the best and least invasive solution necessary. Conservative care is used when surgery is not indicated or when patients have comorbidities or other concerns that do not make them candidates for surgery. Sometimes patients require a combination of conservative treatments, which can include the following:

- Physical therapy
- Pain management, such as anti-inflammatories and epidural injections
- Lifestyle and activity modifications

### Patient pathway: Example of conservative care

*A patient injured her back installing a big screen television on the wall. After a referral to the IU Health Spine Program, she saw a physical medicine and rehabilitation physician who performed a physical exam and medical history before diagnosing the patient with sacroiliac joint dysfunction, or inflammation where the lower back joins the pelvis. The patient completed six weeks of physical therapy, home exercises and activity modifications, which fully relieved her pain. This is an example of non-invasive treatment approaches for neck and back disorders that simply require conservative care.*

### Surgical treatment options

There is a wide array of surgical treatment options for neck and spine disorders. A multidisciplinary team works with the patient to determine the best surgical option, which can be performed by both neurosurgeons and orthopedic surgeons. Selecting the best surgical method involves consideration of the patient's current condition, symptoms, past surgeries, imaging, past invasive strategies and anatomic variance. Surgical options include:

- Diskectomy
- Spinal fusion
- Deformity corrections
- Decompression
- Disc replacement

#### Patient pathway: Example of surgical care after conservative care

After initial conservative care treatments did not resolve pain in the neck, a patient began developing a deeper, throbbing pain and weakness. A magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan showed a pinched nerve that was causing the radiculopathy. The physical medicine physician conferred with a spine surgeon in the same medical center to collaborate and determine the right treatment plan. After epidural injections only temporarily relieved symptoms, the spine surgeon discussed with the patient how these symptoms related to the imaging findings and used a spine model to explain surgical options with the patient. Collectively, they pursued a decompressive surgery, which relieved the patient's symptoms. This is an example of conservative care revealing the need for surgical treatment.



#### Patient pathway: Example of surgical care

A patient was referred to the IU Health Spine Program with severe pain and weakness in his arm. The patient reported pain had worsened over a couple months to the point of a severe toothache. Specialists in conservative and surgical care collaborated to arrange an MRI, which showed a severely herniated disc in the spine was compressing a nerve and causing the pain and weakness. Because the herniated disc was pinching a nerve and causing a neurologic deficit with significant weakness, urgent surgical intervention was pursued, which relieved the patient's symptoms. This is an example of a rare instance in which surgical treatment is the best, first option.

### Conservative care vs. spine surgery

Specialists in the IU Health Spine Program are committed to diagnosing and treating patients with a tailored approach for the individual patient that uses the least amount of intervention necessary. Patients benefit from the collaborative and multidisciplinary services offered within our comprehensive neck and spine program. All our spine specialists are working toward the same goal: alleviating symptoms as simply and quickly as possible. When complex cases call for more invasive procedures, your patients have access to the experienced surgeons capable of the latest surgical options.

#### Refer a patient

Learn more about the IU Health Spine Program by visiting [iuhealth.org/iu-health-spine-program-for-providers](https://iuhealth.org/iu-health-spine-program-for-providers). To refer a patient into the program, call **812.353.BACK**.