Paul Saiz, MD: Treating Spinal Pain: Fusion vs. Disc Replacement

Based in Las Cruces, New Mexico, Paul Saiz, MD has more than a decade of experience in orthopedics and spine surgery. As a spine surgery specialist, Dr. Saiz is often asked about the benefits of disc replacement vs. fusion to treat neck or low back pain.

Traditionally, neck or lower back pain that cannot be alleviated by aggressive, non-surgical treatment has been treated by spinal fusion. Although there are a wide variety of options for spinal fusion, the goal of the surgery is to immobilize the painful moving part by fusing the involved vertebrae with new bone growth.. The major drawback to spinal fusion is that, once fused, other portions of the spine may work harder, and consequently wear out faster than they might otherwise have done.

On the other hand, artificial disc replacement provides an alternative method of pain-relief. Much like artificial hip, knee, or shoulder joints, artificial discs can replace the painful disc in the spine. The first artificial disc was approved for the low back in the United States in 2004, and since then disc replacement for the neck has also been approved. However, due to its nature, disc replacement surgery can only treat limited types of neck/ lower back pain and is not a cure for all for back problems.