

Todd DiCiurcio (shown right, and below with actor Ed Westwick) found a cure for his pain thanks to a chance encounter with a chiropractor.



A pain in the neck

One man's odyssey to find relief from a slipped disc

By RACHEL GRUMMAN

TODD DiCiurcio, an artist in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, was surfing with friends off of Long Beach, NY, last November and enjoying up to 15-foot swells, until he swam out for a second session.



Andrew Walker/Getty Images; WireImage (inset)

"I was paddling and thought I had pulled a muscle in my back," recalled DiCiurcio. "I sat straight up and a wall of pain came over me, down my left arm. For a couple of weeks I couldn't sleep, sit or lay down."

DiCiurcio sought relief through physical therapy with an orthopedist. He would feel fine, but then the pain would snap right back.

"My left arm was in pain," he said. "It felt like every moment someone was dragging a knife across my skin."

At the end of November, he finally got an MRI, which revealed a herniated disc in his neck that was pinching a nerve.

DiCiurcio, whose art encompasses drawings, paintings and sculpture (metdcstudio.com) and whose celebrity clientele includes his buddies, "Gossip Girl" actors Ed Westwick and Jessica Szohr, sought a

I was in. He said, 'I think I can help you.'

They met at Caraccilo's space where he noticed the constricted appearance of DiCiurcio's neck.

"Being a surfer myself, I know that paddling through heavy surf can strengthen the anterior shoulder muscles, creating a rounding of the shoulders and compression," Caraccilo told him. "Surgery is sometimes unavoidable, but through my chiropractic training, I'm here to offer an alternative, less invasive option."

Caraccilo put together a comprehensive plan, including chiropractic adjustments, acupuncture, ultrasound therapy to reduce muscle spasms, eccentric exercises (these strengthen the muscles through elongation as opposed to concentric exercises that shorten the muscle), massage (including deep tissue and Thai massage), and breathing exercises to bring oxygen into the muscles.

"Joe gave me an adjustment and I got acupuncture. It knocked down the pain dramatically after that first session, and it never came back," said DiCiurcio. "It was miraculous."

Added Robert Giordano, the acupuncturist at Space for Wellness who treated DiCiurcio, "Todd reported an 80 percent improvement in his condition after his first acupuncture treatment. Although this is seemingly remarkable when the prognosis from his doctor was poor, it is not atypical of someone in relatively good health to have such a positive response. The combination of chiropractic, acupuncture, massage therapy, nutritional counseling and lifestyle modification all contributed to Todd's good results."

Giordano also notes that when he started treatment, DiCiurcio's condition was relatively recent, and that if his condition had gone untreated for a longer period, the results may not have come so speedily.

DiCiurcio has continued to follow the treatment plan, getting weekly acupuncture and adjustments.

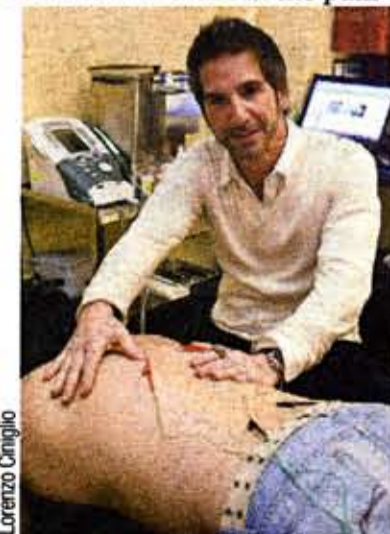
"I feel better than I did before my injury," he said. "It's nothing short of a miracle."

physician's care.

The doctor sent DiCiurcio to a spine surgeon, who told him he needed spinal fusion surgery, in which two or more vertebrae are joined. DiCiurcio decided he would get a second opinion.

By chance, he met Joe Caraccilo, a chiropractor and owner of Space for Wellness in Manhattan (spaceforwellness.com), which provides chiropractic, acupuncture and massage treatments.

"Joe came over and sat down at my table while I was having dinner with my wife and actors Ed Westwick and Jessica Szohr — he mistook me for someone he knew," laughed DiCiurcio. "We started talking about surfing, and I told him about the pain



Lorenzo Criviglio

Joe Caraccilo, chiropractor, runs Space for Wellness in Manhattan, offering alternative therapies.

PUT YOUR BACK INTO IT

Choices in spine treatment

A spinal disc, which acts as a shock absorber between the spine's vertebrae, becomes herniated, slipped or ruptured when part of the disc pushes outside its normal boundaries, towards the spinal canal, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS). This, in turn, puts pressure on the nerves. The result: Pain shoots between the neck and shoulders and down the arm. After a diagnosis is made, often with an MRI, your physician may recommend one or a combination of the following strategies:

■ **Non-invasive treatments**

According to the AAOS, nonsurgical treatments, such as icing the area and taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatories or prescription muscle relaxers, are effective in more than 90 percent of patients.

■ **Physical therapy**

This can include exercises, neck traction, stretching, massage, and ice and heat therapy to alleviate pain. To find a licensed therapist, go to the American Physical Therapy Association's site (apta.org).

■ **Chiropractic**

The practice involves manipulating the spine (as well as ultrasound and therapeutic massage, in some cases), improving blood flow and allowing muscles to relax and

pain to subside. Chiropractic therapy has been shown to help reduce the symptoms as well as reduce the size of a herniated disc. To find a practitioner go to findachiropractor.com. Make sure he or she is a doctor of chiropractic ("DC") and board certified through an association such as the American Chiropractic Association (acatoday.org).

■ **Acupuncture**

The ancient treatment can help with acute muscular contraction, inflammatory response, and impingement of nerve fibers that occur from a herniated disc, according to Robert Giordano. To find an acupuncturist, go to acufinder.com. Choose a licensed practitioner ("L.Ac.") who is a member of the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture.

■ **Steroid injections**

Cortisone injections, administered by a physician, help bring down nerve inflammation. The results may be temporary.

■ **Surgery**

A cervical (neck) discectomy and fusion is the traditional surgery. Performed under general anesthesia, it involves removing all or part of the problematic disc and then fusing two or more vertebrae together. To find an orthopaedic surgeon, go to aaos.org.

— Rachel Grumman