

An end to pain and the gift of a new beginning

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For Jennifer Schott, back pain had almost become an accepted part of life. From the time she was a teenager she had experienced back issues, with intermittent chronic back pain plaguing her for more than 25 years during her adult life. As time went on, she began to realize that back pain was robbing her of the healthy and balanced lifestyle for which she longed.

"It was about two years ago when my pain increased to the point where I could no longer do many of the things I enjoyed. I couldn't walk, sit, do yoga poses, clean, or even lie down for any extended period of time without experiencing pain or aches in my back, legs, or hips," explained Schott, who learned in 2012 she was suffering from degenerative disc disease in the lumbar spine.

Degenerative disc disease is a syndrome in which compromised discs begin causing lower back pain. In addition to this, Jennifer also discovered she had chronic flat-back syndrome, meaning she had no curvature in her spine. Back spasms, stabbing pains and aches, numbness, burning sensations, and a "pins and needles" feeling in the feet were all part of the package. Bending forward, reaching, standing, or sitting for long periods of time only exacerbated the problem.

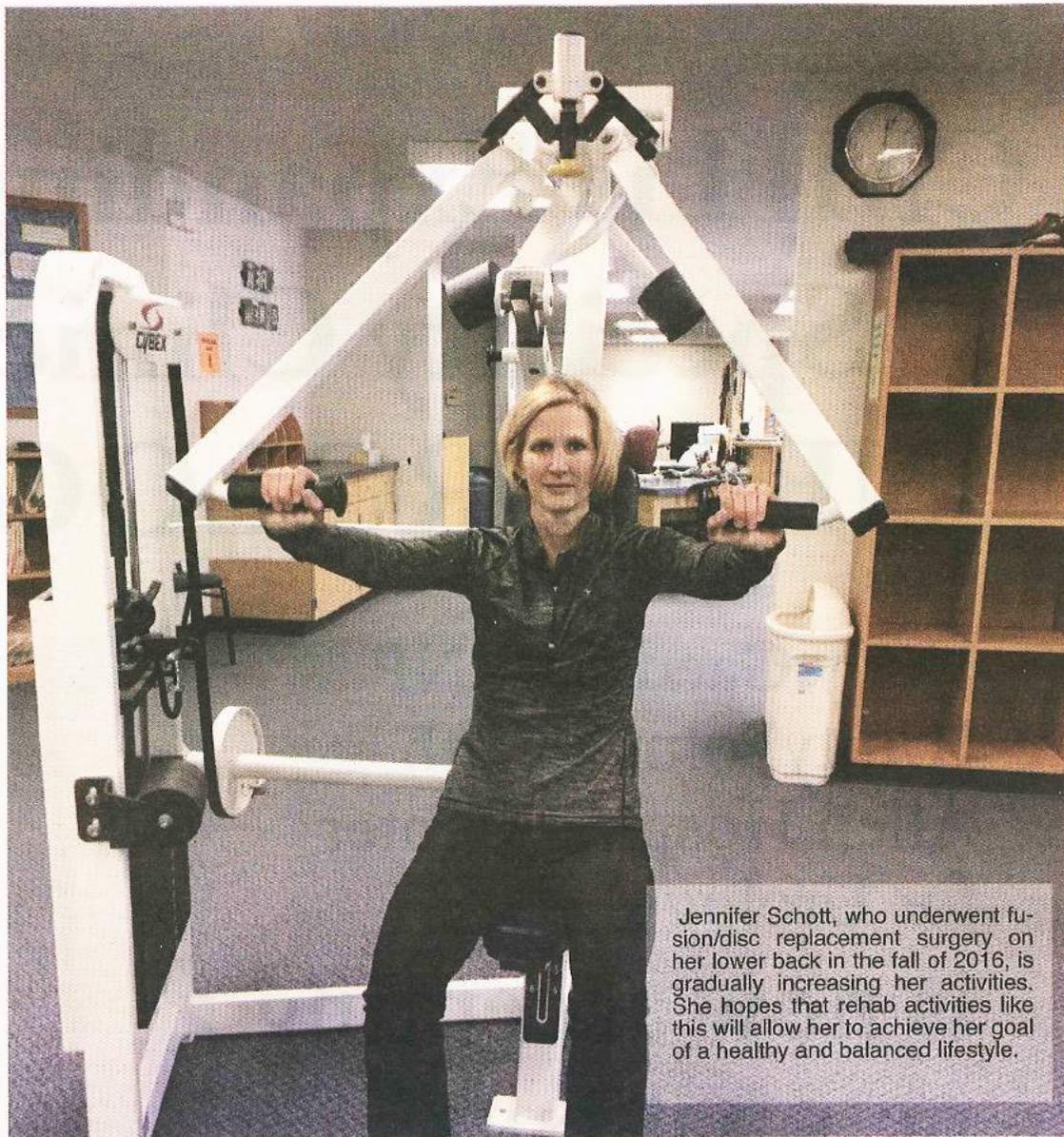
After being diagnosed, Jennifer was left with the option of fusion/disc replacement surgery or attempting to manage the pain on her own. She elected to do the latter at that point for two reasons.

"That type of surgery is a very invasive procedure, and I was not quite ready to take that step in 2012. Also, insurance was an issue because it did not cover artificial disc replacements, only the fusion portion of the procedure," noted the Clermont resident.

Schott tried a variety of methods to address her back issues over the years. Unfortunately, she experienced little success.

"I have tried extensive chiropractic treatment, acupuncture, yoga, massage therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, as well as a

A NEW BEGINNING Continued on Page D-6



Jennifer Schott, who underwent fusion/disc replacement surgery on her lower back in the fall of 2016, is gradually increasing her activities. She hopes that rehab activities like this will allow her to achieve her goal of a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

A NEW BEGINNING Continued

multitude of home care remedies. I was offered prescription medications and injections for the pain, but always declined to use them," added Schott.

Fast-forward to August 2015, when Jennifer's sister Annette and husband Eric Schweinefus offered her an unbelievably amazing gift. The couple informed Jennifer that they would like to financially support her to proceed with the best possible option, surgically or otherwise, to help her return to a more "normal" lifestyle.

"It was an incredible gift of love, so I made arrangements to have all of my medical records sent to Texas Back Institute (TBI) in February 2016. Dr. Richard Guyer, an orthopedic surgeon and world-renowned specialist, agreed to a consult with me in April. I was thrilled to discover he was willing to meet with me!" exclaimed Schott.

After traveling to TBI to meet with Dr. Guyer and getting another physical examination along with more x-rays, it was determined that Jennifer was not a candidate for multilevel disc replacement. However, Dr. Guyer indicated that the best option for her was a level-one fusion and level-one disc replacement.

"After much thought and prayer, I decided to go ahead with the surgery in Texas. Dr. Guyer showed such care and concern for me, and I felt he really had my best interests at heart," said Schott.

The procedure was described officially as "lumbar artificial disc replacement at L4/5 and anterior lumbar fusion at L5/S1." The wife and mother of two boys was in surgery for three hours, during which a two-inch incision was made in her lower abdomen in order to reach her spine. This was the invasive part of the surgery that Schott had considered previously.

"Basically, they took all of my abdominal contents and moved them aside in order to reach my discs. They also took bone marrow from my hip during the surgery and mixed it with a synthetic material to start the bone graft for the spinal fusion," described the northeast Iowa native.

Schott only had to be in the hospital for one night following the surgery, but she had to stay in Plano, Texas, for four days after the surgery to do a post-op visit. She was then cleared to come home to Iowa, a 15-hour trip that took over three days.

"To be honest, this was the most difficult part

due to the side effects of the anesthesia and my pain medications. My sister, who had given me this wonderful gift, accompanied me to and from Texas. She went above and beyond in order to meet my needs and ensure that I was following doctor's orders!" said Schott with a smile.

The procedure had left Schott with a six-degree curvature in her spine, as well as a small gain in height. More importantly, she is on the road to achieving the balanced and healthy lifestyle that she longed for.

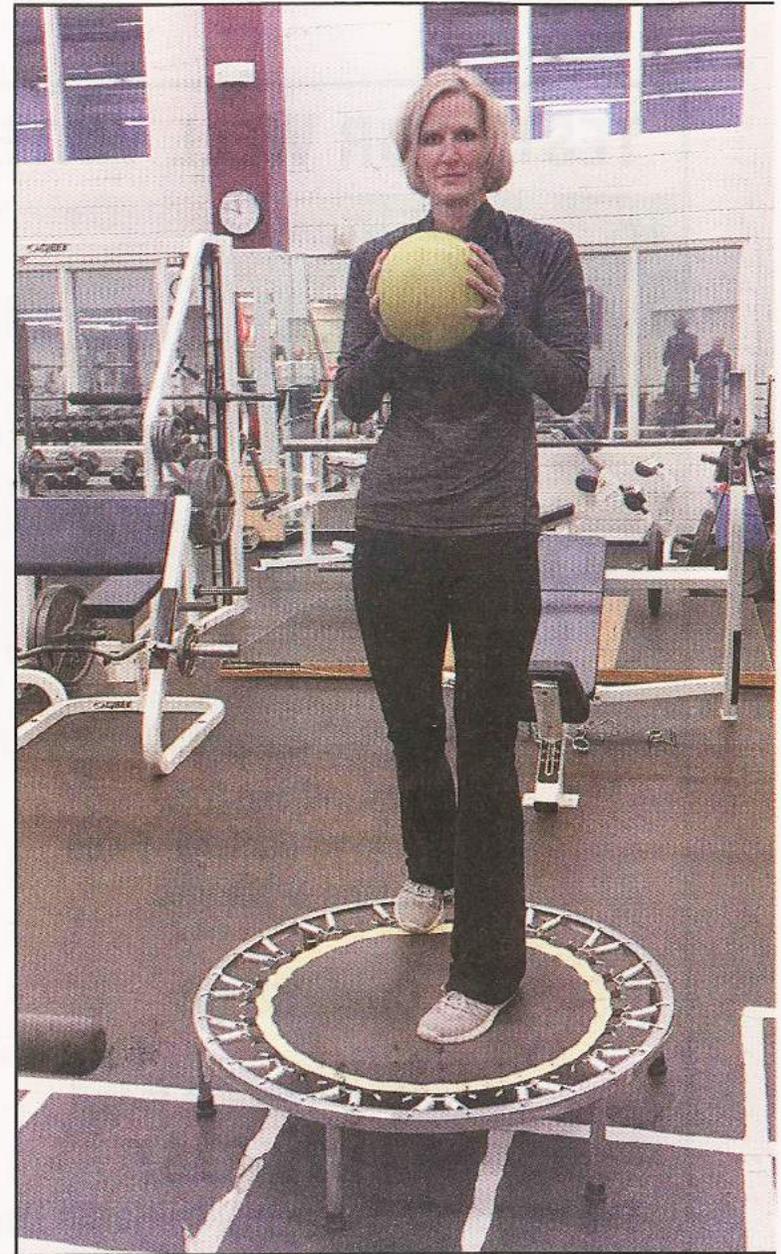
"I am currently still in rehab, which involves physical therapy two times a week and home exercises. I had a couple of setbacks due to muscle issues and falling on the ice during my recovery, but Devin with Team Rehab in Decorah has done an exceptional job of guiding me through the healing process," Jennifer related.

Schott is now beginning to walk longer distances and increase in activity with her therapy. She has had no pain in her lower back and feels energized. She is even revisiting the idea of playing recreational volleyball and fulfilling her dream of hiking the Appalachian Trail.

For the immediate future, Jennifer's husband, Al, and their two boys, Croy and Dane, are planning a family trip to the Boundary Waters in June. Jennifer is eagerly anticipating the opportunity to go on such an active family outing. She knows, however, that she has many others to thank for the blessings she has received.

"I am completely in awe of our Lord and Savior and how His light shines in our lives through other people. I feel so many need to be recognized for what they have done for me. Sharon Harris at Heart of the Valley Healthcare, Dr. Guyer and the hospital staff in Texas, Devin Johnson and Team Rehab in Decorah, and, of course, my sister and her husband, my family, friends, and church family for all of their support," acknowledged Schott gratefully.

Thankfully, the lower back pain that was once a part of Jennifer Schott's life has now been taken away. She now seems poised to begin a life that will allow her to fully participate in not only the everyday activities of life, but also the things that enrich her life as well as the lives of those around her. What better gift could one receive?



Physical therapy twice a week and home exercises are now a regular part of Jennifer Schott's routine since undergoing back surgery last fall. She is very grateful for the chance to trade daily lower back pain for a more active lifestyle that she thoroughly enjoys.