

# BACK IN THE SWING

Inova helps a spinal surgery patient return to the golf course

**W**hen Mickey Filipponi slipped on a tile floor and fell during a vacation last year, the pain was excruciating — but in some ways, the frustration was even worse.

At age 68, he'd experienced back and neck issues for nearly 30 years, partially as a result of a severe car accident. Aggressively pursuing sports and other activities also took their toll, he admits. By the time of the recent fall, he'd been diagnosed with six herniated discs. He'd also consulted with numerous doctors to find some relief.

"To be suffering so long with this was very difficult," he says. "Whenever it would flare up, it impacted my whole life."

Then he spoke with Donald Hope, MD, at Inova Fair Oaks Hospital. In the past,

Dr. Hope had taken a conservative approach and recommended pain shots instead of surgery, but the accident changed the course of his treatment.

"We had to choose the treatment that was most appropriate to get him back to living a normal lifestyle, which means being active," says Dr. Hope. "For Mickey, he really wanted to be able to golf again, so that was our goal."

When Dr. Hope recommended neck fusion surgery, Mickey was nervous. "Having spine surgery is disconcerting, to say the least," he says. "But I knew that without it, another serious injury could put me in a wheelchair."

This type of surgery involves removing a damaged disc in order to relieve spinal cord pressure that might be contributing to pain, numbness or weakness. Mickey was a good candidate because, despite his chronic back and neck issues, he was in good general health and loved being active, which would bode well for a faster recovery.

He had the surgery on Dec. 1, 2016, and was shocked to find he was pain-free the very next day — and every day



Mickey Filipponi can swing a golf club again thanks to neck fusion surgery.

after that, too. Mickey says his neck feels 10 times stronger, and although the 68-year-old doesn't feel like he has the neck and spine of a young man, he does feel at least a few decades younger.

"Most of all, I have less concern and caution now," he says. "If someone pats me on the back, I don't feel like that could throw me to the ground. I'm indebted to Dr. Hope for getting me back on track."

## Personalized Treatment

While his office is called the Center for Cranial and Spinal Surgery, Donald Hope, MD, says that spine surgery is rarely a first option for many patients. In fact, there's no one-size-fits-all type of treatment that tends to work best; every treatment plan is highly personalized depending on patient need.

"We pursue the most conservative methods available, and we develop a plan that helps people live the kinds of lives they want," he says. For some, that might mean getting back to exercise sooner, or being able to pick up a grandchild, or simply reducing pain in order to get quality sleep. Whatever the goal, Inova specialists team up with patients to deliver the most appropriate care for their needs.

## GET BACK

Learn more about spine care at [inovaspine.org](http://inovaspine.org).