

Back to biking after surgery

Shooting pain in the right leg and debilitating back pain do not afflict Mr Hong Khai Hwa anymore – thanks to spinal surgery he underwent.

Mr Hong, 38, a service manager in the semi-conductor industry, said: "It has given me a new lease of life."

Last November at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, he had percutaneous nucleoplasty, a minimally invasive spinal surgery which removes tissue from a damaged disc to decompress the disc and relieve the pressure it exerted on nearby nerves.

Within a month of the \$11,000 operation, he was walking normally again. The biking enthusiast was soon back on his mountain bicycle.

Mr Hong, who is married without children, said: "My doctor, Dr Fong Shee Yan, said I can do whatever I want but I must be careful."

To that end, Mr Hong makes sure he does 15 minutes of core strengthening exercises at least four times a week to build up his back muscles. He learnt those exercises while on a three-month post-surgery programme which teaches patients how to take care of and strengthen their backs.

Ironically, it was mountain biking – as well as a host of other sporting activities – that landed Mr Hong with a bad back.

He developed lower back pain in 1999 because of the accumulated stress in his back from "national service and doing a lot of sports".

He said: "When it began, I felt the pain every morning when I woke up. I needed to sit up in bed for a bit and let my back

muscles relax before I could get up to brush my teeth."

He had to stop running, mountain biking and playing tennis.

In 2000, he sought medical help and underwent conservative treatments like



Nearly a year after his surgery, Mr Hong is mountain biking, running regularly and training for the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon in December.

ST PHOTO: WONG KWAI CH

Office workers should stretch themselves every 1 1/2 to 2 hours

physiotherapy and heat treatment.

However, he still suffered relapses and episodes of acute back pain almost every year and would be bedridden for at least a week each time.

He said: "The episodes were usually triggered after I did a vigorous sport or carried heavy stuff. Once, I sneezed and that tore my back muscle."

That incident landed Mr Hong in hospital for a week and he had to work from home for two months after his discharge.

Besides back pain, he had also been suffering shooting pain in his right leg for

more than six years.

Last year, an aunt, who works in Mount Elizabeth Hospital, came across an article on minimally invasive back surgery. Mr Hong jumped at the chance to regain a pain-free back.

Nearly a year after his surgery, he is mountain biking, running regularly and training for the Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon in December.

He said: "I'm almost back to normal. I'm back to mountain biking every weekend."

June Cheo