Kay Mercogliano is back to her old self after minimally invasive spine surgery to treat her back pain.
After years of suffering from persistent and worsening back pain, Kay Mercogliano found relief with Jae Lim, MD, a specially trained neurosurgeon who practices at Inova Fairfax Hospital. Dr. Lim performed Mercogliano’s minimally invasive spine surgery in February, and now she’s back to enjoying life.
Kay Mercogliano doesn’t like to sit on the sidelines. The 60-year-old retired social worker and marriage counselor has always led an active life of volunteer work, horseback riding, billiards, bowling and long walks with her husband, Anthony. But persistent and worsening back pain was making it increasingly difficult for Mercogliano to do the things she loved, and this Dumfries resident feared surgery was inevitable.

“I tried every alternative to avoid surgery—physical therapy, aquatic exercise, acupuncture, spinal injections and nerve blocks,” she says. “Nothing worked.”

Eventually, Mercogliano met with Jae Lim, MD, a neurosurgeon specially trained in spine surgery who practices at Inova Fairfax Hospital, to discuss her options. “His explanation of the procedure and benefits was the answer I was waiting to hear,” she says.

Dr. Lim recommended minimally invasive spine surgery, a technologically advanced treatment that allows surgeons to perform complex procedures through small incisions, resulting in better patient outcomes. “Minimally invasive techniques are changing the landscape of spine surgery, converting what used to be large, open procedures with long incisions and lengthy recovery to a much less invasive experience, reducing surgical impact on the body and hastening the recovery process,” says Dr. Lim.

MINIMALLY INVASIVE
Advantages of minimally invasive surgery include less blood loss and postoperative pain, shorter hospital stay, improved healing and faster recuperation—often just a few months rather than the longer periods typically required after conventional spine surgery.

“New tools and research have produced tremendous advances in surgical treatments for the spine in the last decade, and Inova offers the latest techniques available,” says Ron Childs, MD, section leader of orthopedic spine surgery and section chief of spine surgery at Inova Fairfax Hospital.

Physical therapy can be an effective treatment option for back pain, and Inova Health System’s 16 outpatient physical therapy sites offer world-class services to treat a broad range of orthopedic and neurological problems. “Physical therapy’s biggest benefit is individualized care from a highly trained professional whose goal is to improve patients’ quality of life and teach them how to manage their back pain independently,” says Michael McMurray, PT, DPT CSCS, clinic director, Inova Physical Therapy Center-SportsPlex.

Physical therapists can improve spine mobility, help control pain, train patients in proper body mechanics and lifting techniques, and design a personalized exercise plan that targets specific trouble spots. Patients have conditions ranging from herniated discs to leg tingling and numbness to intermittent low backache and sacroiliac problems.

McMurray recommends talking to your physician before deciding whether physical therapy is right for you. Above all, he says, take action. “Too often we see patients who have had back pain for years and never done anything about it. By the time they get here, the problem has escalated to a critical level.”

In addition to 16 conveniently located Inova Physical Therapy Centers, outpatient physical therapy services are available at each of Inova’s hospitals. For more information, locations and directions, visit www.inova.org/physicaltherapy.
When mom said, “Don’t slouch,” she knew what she was talking about. For the majority of people, what they do on a day-to-day basis is key to managing back pain. Simple lifestyle changes can make a world of difference,” says Roberta Johnson, program manager, my strong back, Inova’s unique, 6-week, online program to manage or prevent back pain. With the help of a personal health coach, my strong back picks up where mom left off, focusing on three areas—physical activity, stress management and posture—to strengthen the body and avert pain. “Your coach really gets to know you and is available to answer questions and provide ongoing guidance and support, all from the comfort of your own home,” Johnson says.

My strong back can help those experiencing occasional aches and pains as well as patients with diagnosed back problems, recovering from surgery or under medical treatment. Even the pain-free can benefit, with a risk assessment and prevention plan.

Physical therapy following her surgery has allowed Mercogliano to resume many of the activities she enjoys, including billiards.

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