



# John Gifford, LMT, CBPM, BCTMB

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## Herniated Disks and Still Pain Free?

Answer these questions out loud as you read: What's one thousand forty plus one thousand forty? Plus ten? Plus ten? Three thousand, right? Add the numbers on a piece of paper and see if you still arrive at the same answer. Sometimes our initial conclusions are incorrect. When we are told we have a herniated disc, arthritis of the spine, or other spinal abnormality, we assume we are damaged goods and we will have to learn to live with the pain at best, and look forward to a life of disability at worst.

But is this an accurate assumption? For years many studies have shown that objective findings don't always correlate with subjective symptoms. The following study reported in the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, March 1990, may interest you:

Magnetic Resonance Imaging was performed on sixty-seven individuals who NEVER had back pain or sciatica (pain that originates in the buttock and travels down the back of the thigh). The scans were read by three independent neuro-radiologists who had no knowledge about the subjects. One-third of the subjects were found to have a substantial abnormality. They found bulging disks, evidence of

disc degeneration, and one instance of spinal stenosis (a narrowing of the space in the spinal column where nerves pass through), all in individuals who never had an incident of back pain.

Remember that having pain and having a structural abnormality does not always mean that the two are related in any way.

I wish every time a patient was given their CAT scan, x-ray, or MRI results that showed a disk herniation, they were educated that the herniation may or may not be a contributor to their symptoms. As one of my clients who is a physician told me,

"If the disk problem is severe enough to require surgical intervention, there will be more signs than just the findings on the MRI. They will also have weakness and possibly bladder control issues as well." While I was in Sedona at a conference, an orthopedic surgeon told our group that even though he sees a disk problem on the MRI he still doesn't know whether the disk problem has been present for weeks or years. Why is this knowledge so important? Because we often base our activity level on the beliefs we have about our body, and if those beliefs are wrong, we may needlessly restrict activities that are good for us. Till next time,

*"Remember that having pain and having a structural abnormality does not always mean that the two are related in any way."*

-John C. Gifford, CBPM, NCTMB  
Owner, Motionwise®



John Gifford has performed over 40,000 sessions as an approved provider of sports massage and a unique style of bodywork called Bonnie Prudden Myotherapy® and Exercise Therapy®. His mission as a clinician, lecturer, consultant, and author is to empower people to lead more active, successful, and fulfilling lives through the reduction and prevention of their muscular pain and tension.