



Mark Schoene

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Mark Schoene is a journalist specializing in back pain and sports medicine. He is the editor of the *BackLetter*, a newsletter on spinal research for healthcare professionals published by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins. He lives on a barrier island off the coast of Massachusetts. He is an avid scuba diver and naturalist.

Mark offers his own experience as a cautionary tale for anyone seeking medical care for non-specific back symptoms. "I tweaked my back in my 20s and became the unwitting recipient of the traditional medical approach to low back pain. My doctors prescribed months of bed rest, passive treatments, and complete avoidance of physical activity. I stopped working and dropped out of university. My back pain intensified.

A series of prominent specialists offered conflicting diagnoses, from ankylosing spondylitis to advanced degenerative disc disease. All offered debilitating treatment packages to match. I grew so disenchanted with medical management that I accidentally stumbled on the approach that has subsequently become the state-of-the-art in back pain rehabilitation. I decided to make an aggressive return to full function despite continuing symptoms.

I took up a progressive exercise program and stuck with it. I returned to school and resumed work. I stopped worrying about reinjuring myself and stopped considering myself a patient. My back pain resolved within a year and I have never had anything more than passing discomfort ever since.

This is not to say that all back pain will resolve with a return to normal activity. But it is best to be as active as possible within any pain experience. Even if back pain persists, it should be a small aspect of a large, active life rather than a dominating aspect of a small one."