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Back on Track

The Aspen Back Institute is not necessarily what the doctor ordered.

LAST FOURTH OF JULY weekend, 64-year-old Larry Saliterman took a spill on his mountain bike, got up, brushed himself off, and then hopped back on and continued riding. Unaware that he had injured himself seriously, Saliterman remained active throughout the weekend, going in-line skating and completing Aspen's annual five-mile footrace. "The day after the race, I was in bad shape and couldn't walk," says Saliterman, who was airlifted to his hometown hospital in Minnesota, where an MRI revealed two herniated disks. "The orthopedic surgeon told me I had to have surgery right away."

Faced with the operation and the possibility of giving up his active lifestyle, Saliterman found an alternative remedy at the Aspen Back Institute. Under the direction of Clint Phillips, a former chiropractor from South Africa and a certified strength and conditioning trainer, the clinic, which opened at the St. Regis Resort, Aspen in June 2005, attempts to heal back pain through non-surgical, holistic methods. The clinic offers intense, customized programs of physical therapy, exercise, stretching, and deep tissue massage that are intended to help clients avoid surgery or to relieve their chronic back pain. The institute also offers educational seminars and relaxation exercises in an environment that resembles a spa more than a physical therapy clinic. "Getting people over the fear of their backs is an important factor," says Phillips. "They have hurt themselves bending and twisting and are afraid to do it again."

Many people do hurt themselves bending and twisting—or falling off mountain bikes. According to the National

Institutes of Health, for people younger than 45, no ailment limits activity more frequently than back pain, and it is the second most common reason why adults seek medical help.

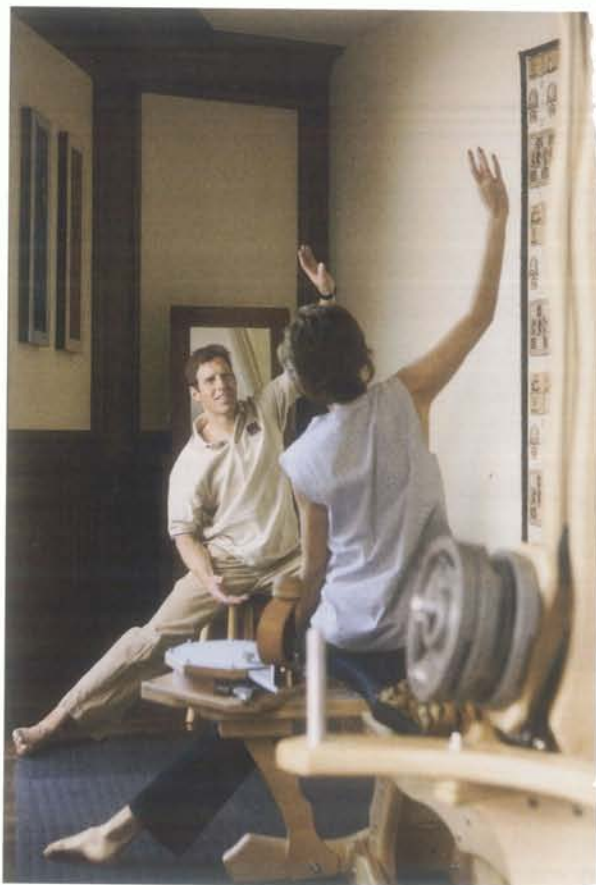
In terms of the way he spends his leisure time, Saliterman is a typical Aspen Back Institute patient. "Many of our clients are hard-driven in work and play," says Phillips. "They often come in with an injury and once it gets better,

they want to know what else they can do to improve their body." Golfers are regulars, he adds. "They tell me that they love golf, but it kills their back. Their pain is usually present because their back and core muscles are weak."

After discovering that weak abdominal, or core, muscles were contributing to Saliterman's pain, Phillips altered his client's regular exercise routine by adding workouts on a stability ball and gyrotomics, a movement-based exercise that is similar to Pilates. "We made sure he was sleeping correctly, moving with good posture, and had the right mental approach to his recovery," says Phillips. Saliterman did have to ease his rigorous training and stop running marathons.

Phillips, who recommends a three-week program at the institute to begin the recovery process, boasts of a 95

percent success rate. Saliterman can be counted among those successes. "Back in July, the surgeon told me that I would never again ski bumps and that biking was out," says Saliterman. "As of last December, I'm skiing the bumps and I just started biking again. As long as I stay on my program, I can do almost anything." —KIM FREDERICKS



Aspen Back Institute, 970.920.7772, aspenback.com

The Aspen Back Institute employs nonsurgical therapies in a spa environment to treat back pain.