



Take Control of Your Pain

Meet Dr. Ralph Menard,
Interventional Pain Medicine Specialist

There is no need to suffer chronic pain with the availability of treatments offered through Hill Country Memorial Medical Group, according to Ralph G. Menard, MD, Pain Management Specialist.

“I don’t have a magic wand,” Menard said. “But there are a lot of interventional treatments we can do that can greatly lessen or eliminate pain.”

Menard generally treats chronic pain, which has been recently redefined by the Texas Medical Board as pain lasting longer than 30 days. The main causes can be cancer; back, neck, or leg injury; or simply aging.

Menard, who is active in pain research, offers several recent techniques when treating pain relating to the spine, one of the most common complaints of older people.

When someone fractures a vertebra, it can take up to four months to heal and can be immensely painful. There are two ways of treating these. The first is vertebroplasty, where the doctor injects a special cement that flows into the fracture to fill up the fault lines.

Menard offers a second option called kyphoplasty. In this procedure, the team inserts a balloon into the fracture area and inflates it. The balloon creates an egg-like cavity in the bone, keeping the glue inside the shell.

“I think it is safer and better for the patient,” he said. “And a lot of times when you inflate the balloon, you restore some of the height in that vertebra.”

Menard also offers injections which can reduce swelling and take pressure off the nerves, but sometimes those injections just aren’t enough. He describes two other procedures available through HCM’s Pain Management.

Spinal Cord Stimulation

A spinal cord stimulator is typically used for leg, arm, and back pain. In the last three years the technology has improved to the point they eliminate paresthesia—that tingling sensation some patients felt with earlier models.

Vertiflex spacer

Doctors can insert a tiny spacer at the stenotic level, relieving pressure on the spinal cord without major surgery. It’s not a cure, but it is a stopgap measure that allows treatment they would not get otherwise.

While all these procedures can be part of a pain treatment plan, according to Menard one of the best ways to avoid chronic pain is to take steps to prevent it.

“I think physical exercise is the key to wellness and decreased pain,” he said. “If you are conditioned, you’re going to feel less pain than if you’re not conditioned. It’s true across the life span, and even more important

for older folks. Because as we age, we lose muscle mass. For example, if you have a lot of arthritis in your lower back, when you have nice strong muscles those joints won’t have excess of movement. They’re not going to hurt as much.”

A Navy veteran, Dr. Menard earned his medical degree at the Medical College of Georgia. He completed his internship and residency in Anesthesiology at the Medical College of Georgia and finished his Naval career at the Orlando Naval Hospital as Chief of Anesthesia. Dr. Menard holds several board certifications, including the American Board of Anesthesiology Sub-specialty in Pain Medicine and the American Board of Pain Medicine. He held a faculty position in the Anesthesiology Department at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center from 1995 until 2014, when he joined HCM Medical Group.

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