

## Air Force Captain FINDS RELIEF from Progressive Scoliosis



Diagnosed with progressive scoliosis at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Capt. Garrett Garcia knew he wouldn't be a pilot. He became a developmental engineer instead and continued to serve his country with honor.

But he also endured years of worsening pain as the condition advanced.

"I like to run a lot, but the asymmetry started to tear up my legs," recalls Garcia. "I was getting a lot of stress injuries. I was having increasing pain in my day-to-day job, sitting at a desk. But I still dealt with it. I didn't want to bring it up." This, after a move from Boston to Tucson and two deployments.

Then, his blood pressure started to rise too high for a fit 29-year-old. After his second tour abroad, Garcia went to see Dr. Gerard J. Jeong at the Tucson Orthopaedic Institute in 2009.

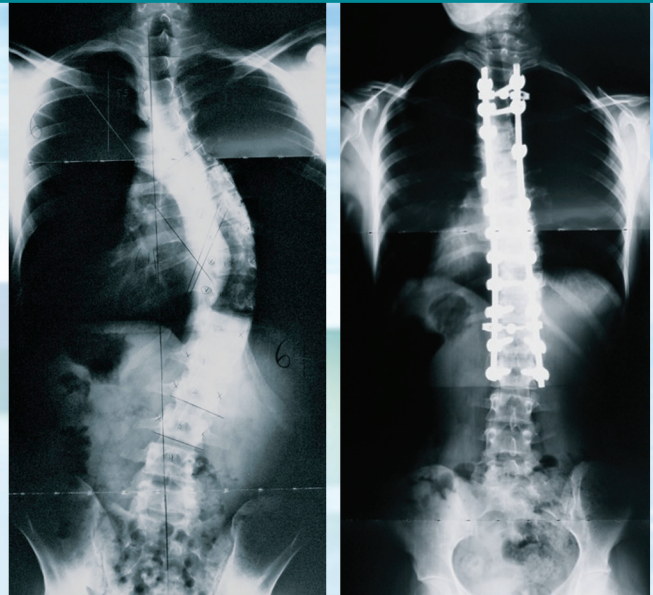
"Progressive scoliosis can be disfiguring and painful," says Jeong, a specialist in spine and scoliosis surgery. "Large curves can continue to progress even in adulthood, and in less common instances, restrict pulmonary function." Garcia didn't want surgery, but his condition was becoming a 24-hour problem. He couldn't sleep, and the pain was making him absolutely miserable, so he decided to move forward with the operation.



Gerard J. Jeong, MD

Jeong and his team performed a posterior spinal reconstruction, a complex operation that corrects the scoliosis by inserting pedicle screws into the vertebral bone throughout Garcia's lumbar and thoracic spine. Through the surgery, Jeong was able to correct the scoliosis from the front and side view, as well as minimize a significant rib hump that was developing.

Garcia was walking around the next day but remained in the hospital for almost five days. He continued to improve with each post-operation appointment. Though Garcia had to take a military



Before and after x-rays of Garrett Garcia

leave for the operation, he was eventually able to return to active duty.

"It was a good life experience," he recalls. "It helped me appreciate things ... that most people take for granted. And the recovery was much more rapid than I thought."

Garcia has even deployed again since the surgery.

"The pain is gone," he says. He's lost some flexibility but is back to running and has even noticed a half-inch gain in his height, as well as a 20-point drop in his blood pressure, having made no other lifestyle changes. Though he knows the surgery isn't a guarantee against future scoliosis problems, Garcia is pleased to be able to move on with his life.

"This case is truly an example of how technology has really advanced patient care," says Jeong. "The tools, devices, and techniques used were able to correct the rib hump without a separate incision and without resecting his ribs. As recently as six or seven years ago, these techniques were not available."

"It is something that surgeons appreciate, trying to minimize patient risk."

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