

Chronic back pain misery of TV doc

A DEBILITATING back condition left This Morning doctor Chris Steele in agony.

Chris, the resident medic on the smash-hit ITV daytime show, was unable to carry out the simplest of tasks without suffering terrible pains.

Chris (66) explained: "I had been suffering with lower back pain for a few months.

"It was caused by a combination of factors including osteoarthritis of the spine, and just general wear and tear from regular bending and lifting.

"I carried out a self-diagnosis of lower lumbar pain, affecting the lumbar vertebrae and sacroiliac joints.

"The pain was very extreme, and its severity made it a terrible nuisance.

"It was there almost all of the time and stopped me from doing even the simplest everyday things.

"It was difficult to bend down or pick things up — bending in any direction was very painful and very difficult.

"I also found it a challenge just getting up from the sofa."

As a working GP, Chris is well aware of just how common back pain is and how it can affect our lives.

"Lower back pain is one of the most common causes for absence from work," revealed Chris.

"The Labour Force Survey from The Office of National Statistics published last year looked at the number of days lost by the workforce across the UK — and neck, back



by Gavin Sherriff

and upper limb pain accounted for 25% of all days lost per year.

"A total of 34.4 million working days are lost each year.

"It's very common as you get older, as a result of wear and tear.

"It's my age. People just accept that it's part of getting old and take painkillers, but they're not without side effects.

"Painkillers that contain codeine can cause constipation and addiction.

"Anti-inflammatories can cause gastro-intestinal problems, so you have to be careful prescribing them for older patients."

Although Chris had been taking painkillers and anti-inflammatory tablets, relief finally came in the form of Alpha-Stim, a new type of electronic pain relief, pioneered in America, which has enabled him to live virtually pain free.

The makers say the device kick-starts healing in the body by



Dr Chris Steele.

passing a specific type of small electric current through the body.

"The effects from this were quite something else — it got me through a very painful time and I have been more or less pain free since," added Chris.

"The one thing that really impressed me was the speed at which it helped act on my pain and how effective it was.

"It meant that I

could reduce my painkiller intake quite dramatically.

"You can go about your normal activities and no-one knows that you're having treatment.

"It's quite harmless. You can use it safely every day for months and that's what's so attractive about the Alpha-Stim.

"There are no drugs, so there are no side effects, and no interaction with other

medication that you might be taking.

"That's the beauty of it — it's safe to use and, more importantly, very effective.

"My neighbour had been suffering with extreme back pain, so I gave her my device to take away with her when she went on holiday to France.

"She said she was very impressed and got a lot of relief — and I haven't seen it since!"

Incredible implants that simply disappear

TINY electronic devices could soon be implanted to tackle infection or provide pain relief before dissolving completely, writes Alan Shaw.

The so-called "transient electronics" can generate localised heat to fight infection or stimulate nerve endings to reduce pain.

And they don't need risky surgical procedures for removal after completing their job, either.

The electronics are enclosed in a

material that dissolves when exposed to water or body fluids.

Once the protective sheath has dissolved, the electronic connections take about 30 minutes to disintegrate, stopping the device.

These "born-to-die" electronics are silicone-based, but can dissolve because the silicone is extremely thin — while a standard chip would take 1,000 years to dissolve inside a body, these ones take just two weeks to vanish.

The devices power themselves by using "piezoelectric" zinc oxide, which produces electricity when bent or twisted by the movement of the body's muscles, the pulsing of blood vessels or its heartbeat.

Other potential medical applications include pacemakers, temperature monitors and drug-delivery systems.

However, more sinister military uses could be electronic eyes and ears that vanish once a mission is over.



Legs 4 Africa cut UK waste

WITH an estimated 2,000 used prosthetic limbs being disposed of each year in the UK alone, a new project is aiming to find them a better home.

Legs 4 Africa plans to channel the redundant limbs to people that need them across the continent.

Founder Tom Williams aims to start by supplying and transporting 200 limbs to the Royal Victoria Teaching Hospital in the Gambia.

Two volunteers will travel 3,708 miles, from Leicestershire to the Gambia, where the limbs will be customised for their new owners.

New drug hope in malaria fight



SCIENTISTS are a step closer to developing a new malaria vaccine.

A team from Dundee University say they have discovered an "exciting" new compound that could be developed into a new drug.

There are thought to be more than 200 million cases of malaria around the world each year, with more than 600,000 of those proving fatal.

There's an urgent need for new drugs, as the parasite that causes malaria is developing resistance to current medicines.

Longer life for Brits by 2050

A NEW report claims advances in medicine, drugs and surgery have accounted for life expectancy rising from 40 to 70 in 50 years.

By 2050, the University College London study states, further progress "could virtually eliminate disease-related child and working-age adult deaths".

Gastric bypass gave us new lease of life

A COUPLE are celebrating their joint weight loss by renewing their wedding vows in Las Vegas.

Kevin and Catherine Falconer managed to lose 15 stone between them after having gastric bypass surgery.

In fact, it was the success of Kevin's procedure in April, 2013, that spurred Catherine to have the same surgery last October.

"It's been a good experience being able to support each other throughout the process," said Catherine.

"Seeing Kevin's success gave me the confidence to have the surgery, as I was quite frightened."

Kevin, who's 60, is 5ft 3in and weighed in at 25 stone.

He's now 14½ stone, having lost more than 60% of his body mass.

Catherine, who's 59, needed a gynaecological operation, but was unable to go through with it due to her size.

She topped the scales at 19½ stone, and now weighs just under 15 stone.

"We both feel we've been given a new lease of life," said Kevin.

The couple, who have been married 24 years, plan to celebrate by renewing their wedding vows in Las Vegas this April.

Both had long-term weight problems and had tried a variety of diets, exercise and medication.

Kevin, an HGV lorry driver, admits his diet in the past consisted mainly of "lay-by food" and huge fried breakfasts.

"She said she was very impressed and got a lot of relief — and I haven't seen it since!"

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The weight simply piled on over the years.

"When you are as fat as I was, you give up all hope," he said.

Catherine said the final straw for her was during a trip to Bridlington with one of her eight grandchildren.

"I couldn't walk even a short distance without getting breathless and having to sit down, and I could not make it down the steps to the beach," she said.

"I came home and started crying.

"We decided it really was time to do something about it.

Their GP referred them to Professor Peter Lodge, consultant hepatobiliary and weight-loss surgeon at Spire Leeds Hospital.

Professor Lodge said: "Kevin and Catherine were in serious trouble when they first came to see me.

"At 25 stone and with a BMI of 53, Kevin was classified as super-obese and as a result, would have a predicted life expectancy of 20 years less than average.

"Catherine's BMI was 43 — normal is 18 to 25 — and being overweight had seriously affected her joints and breathing.

"She could only walk a few



Kevin and Catherine opted for surgery when their weight got out of control.

yards without having to stop to catch her breath, and she would often wake up during the night breathless — a dangerous condition known as sleep apnoea."

He performed Laparoscopic Roux-en-Y gastric bypass surgery, a keyhole operation which meant they were in hospital for only one night and were up and about within hours of the surgery.

Within 10 days, they were eating normally.

Catherine said: "Professor Lodge is my hero!

"This year, I plan to be running around with my grandkids.

"I have so much to look forward to, I can't stop smiling."

Catherine, a taxi driver, had struggled with her weight since a teenager and suffers with osteoarthritis and other

health issues, which made it difficult for her to exercise.

She had to grab food while driving and would share takeaways and cakes with other drivers.

Both Kevin and Catherine now eat smaller portions of healthier food, which they cook and take to work, avoiding the temptation to snack on convenience foods.

"I don't miss the fatty foods at all," added Kevin.

Prevent a cold? Just wash your hands!



Wash your hands to stop the march of common cold germs.

THOSE crafty Canadians have come up with a cure for the common, yet pesky, cold, writes Alan Shaw.

Well, not exactly, but some of the latest findings from the country's medics have advanced our understanding more than the Common Cold Unit did in all its 45 years.

Basically, the evidence in the Canadian Medical Association Journal is overwhelming that hand-washing and zinc supplements are the best way of avoiding a case of the sniffles.

Other "cures" such as garlic, ginseng, echinacea, vapour rubs and vitamin C showed little or no benefit.

Indeed, the best evidence was that physical interventions, such as good, old-fashioned hand-washing with soap and water and using alcohol-based disinfectants and hand wipes reduced the risk of contracting or spreading upper respiratory tract infections — otherwise known as the common cold.

A daily dose of zinc sulphate was also found to prevent colds

in children and reduce school absences.

The best medicine? Paracetamol, apparently, with over-the-counter cough suppressants showing no benefit in children and little in adults.

Honey at bedtime was found to help stop coughs in children aged one or over.

Me? I swear by a sugar-free mint to help soothe a tickly cough, and a traditional Highland remedy, single malt, of course, to treat a cold.



"You know very well what I meant when I said you had to wear a mask in the operating theatre!"



"Still on that acupuncture treatment, Frank?"



"So, you're starting to dream in colour? Sounds like a pigment of your imagination!"



"I've been feeling my age a bit recently, doctor!"