



A Leeds surgeon believe age should not be a barrier to surgical procedures that improve life. **Catherine Scott** reports.

# OP THAT GAVE MAVIS HER LIFE BACK

MAVIS Morley, 87, thought her life was over when she developed a debilitating condition which left her so weak she became wheelchair bound.

Within a matter of months the independent former Leeds publican's condition deteriorated so rapidly she couldn't even hold her toothbrush.

But a life-changing 40-minute surgical procedure in Leeds has restored her mobility and her independence.

Mavis had suffered from the effects of wear and tear in her spine but managed to live independently in her own home.

experienced tingling in the fingers of both hands.

"My mum had seen various doctors but no one could get to the bottom of the problem," said her daughter Jackie. "They initially thought it was carpal tunnel until they realised it was affecting all five fingers. Then her limbs became weaker and it got rapidly worse. It was a massive change. She went from walking to using a wheelchair by four weeks before surgery."

Mavis was eventually referred to Mr Deb Pal, consultant neurosurgeon at Spire Leeds Hospital.

"After he examined her, Mr Pal knew exactly what the problem was," said Jackie.



Then within the space of just eight months her condition deteriorated.

She lost the strength in her arms and hands and she went from someone who could look after herself to one who could not even lift a toothbrush.

"At the time I thought 'it's the end of my life'. I could not imagine a life in a wheelchair depending on others for my care," said Mavis. "Now, after the surgery I have my life back. It's like a miracle!"

The problem started in January 2014 when Mavis

MRI scans confirmed Mavis had Cervical Spondylotic Myelopathy (CSM) – spinal cord compression, which is common among the elderly.

"Mavis had experienced a rapid progression of weakness to the point where she was unable to lift her arms or pick anything up and she was unable to stand or walk," says Mr Pal. "When I first saw her she was completely wheelchair bound. Without surgery her condition would have possibly deteriorated further."

## WEAR AND TEAR TAKES ITS TOLL

CERVICAL spondylosis is due to the 'wear and tear' of the vertebrae and discs in the neck.

It is a normal part of ageing and does not cause symptoms in many people. However, it is sometimes a cause of neck pain. Symptoms tend to come and go. Treatments include keeping the neck moving, neck exercises and painkillers.

In severe cases, it may cause irritation or pressure on the spinal nerve roots or spinal cord. This can cause arm or leg symptoms. In these severe cases, surgery may be an option.

Mr Pal explained the procedure he would perform and Mavis decided to go ahead with surgery straight away despite the risks due to her age. Mavis underwent a minimally invasive Cervical SPLIT Laminectomy in September 2014 to remove pressure to the spine in the neck.

“Compared to the standard

procedure of surgery, Cervical Laminectomy, this technique is less invasive and much quicker, which is ideal in elderly patients as they are exposed to a shorter duration of anaesthesia. Moreover the period of recovery is shorter as well,” said Dr Pal.

“After surgery it was amazing,” said Jackie.

“Straight away she could

raise her arms again and shortly after she got up and started taking small steps. My mum and all the family are absolutely delighted. She is doing really well and now able to look after herself once again. She is back to her busy life, making clothes on her sewing machine, she’s even able to do a bit of gardening, which she loves.”

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**Mavis Morley, patient case study**  
**Mr Deb Pal, consultant neurosurgeon**

Mr. Pal is actively working to raise awareness of this procedure for older patients with the condition.

“Often elderly patients are informed that there is nothing that can be done for them. But there is!” said Mr. Pal.

“Cervical spinal cord compression leads to weakness in hands and difficulty with walking with unsteadiness on feet and recurrent falls. Unlike wear and tear in the lower back, this condition often leads to rapid progression of symptoms, with the patients becoming significantly disabled and even wheelchair bound. I do not believe age should be a factor in offering surgery to any patient. Moreover if surgery is simple, quick and effective it has to be clearly indicated in appropriate patients.

“If there is delay in treatment, symptoms become irreversible. The condition can occur in adults but is more commonly observed in elderly patients due to wear and tear of the spine with age. Patients need to be aware of such symptoms and should consult their doctor without delay should they experience such symptoms.”