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A little gadget with the strength to end a surfer's blues

Those with chronic back pain are right to be cynical about miracle cures but the invention of a Cornish engineer may be the real thing, says fellow sufferer Ben Hunt

Early Wednesday morning I have not been able to carry shampoo bottle from the floor of the shower without having to bend my knees; 10 minutes later I put on both my socks and shoes while standing.

Now I dare say the majority of readers manage these feats every day without so much as a passing thought. But for me a small rush of elation accompanied each time it was the first time in more than 10 years that I have been able to perform such tasks without stabbing pains in the small of my back and down my left leg.

I have lived with back pain since a moment of youthful foolishness on a Hawaiian surfing beach in 1990 left me with a slipped lumbar disc, which has degenerated steadily and irreversibly since, spreading misery and mayhem on the way.

Like all sufferers of chronic back pain I have come to understand one eternal truth: with a bad back you can never be comfortable it nags away day and night provoking symptoms that run from minor irritation through to raging, indescribable pain.

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wife, who has had to heave heavy boxes all over three houses through two moves whenever she has found a moment to put the children down

I have also become well acquainted with great swathes of the medical establishment

Like Tony Blair, I have had anti-inflammatory injections I have had two bouts

of surgery, plenty of spinal manipulation, enough drugs to open a surgery and if they gave out air miles for physiotherapy I could fly first class around the world once a week for the rest of my life.

I stopped believing there was a solution to my problem about five years ago and that my only option was to manage the pain and try to put the brakes on the deterioration I know will come with age.

Certainly I did not expect to find an answer in the hands of a Cornish energy exploration engineer in a suite in London's Dorchester Hotel while looking into the story of a New York-based investment vehicle raising funds.

The investment group, Sky Capital Enterprises, had set up shop in the Dorchester to showcase Advanced Spinal Technologies, one of its leading investments, which it hopes will bring back pain relief to the masses through the ingenious invention of Robert Taylor, the aforementioned Cornishman.

Now if 15 years of back pain teaches you anything it is a healthy dose of scepticism about new treatments,

and the hard sell approach of the Americans promoting their company did little to stuff this reflex.

"This will change people's lives," said Ross Mandell, president and chief executive of Sky.

Yada, yada, yada. Heard it all before. Acupuncture. It will change your life! The Sleeppeezee miracle mattress. It will change your life! Tosh. Mucking about in the surf on the north shore of Oahu. That will change your life.

The only arrow that made it through my chain mail of



Spine-tingling. Ben Hunt on a visit to Harley Street Daniel Lynch

brae. All of which sounded simple enough and, as far I am aware, is pretty much this actually means is anybody's guess but in the hands of a skilled practitioner such as Taylor it effectively returns mobility to stiff and long unused joints.

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