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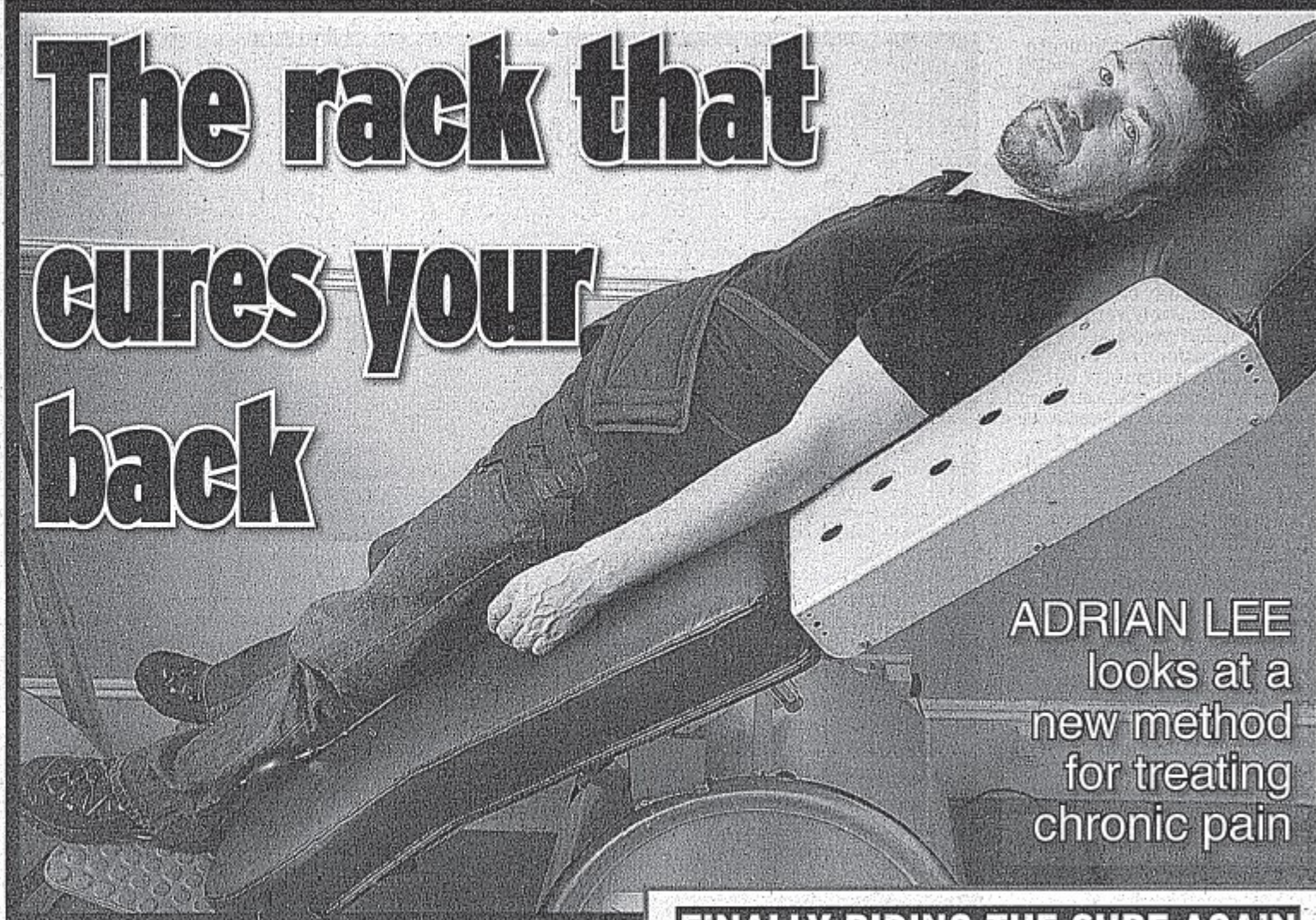


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# The rack that cures your back



ADRIAN LEE looks at a new method for treating chronic pain

## FINALLY RIDING THE SURF AGAIN

**NEIL CRANSTON** (above), 44, from Brighton, East Sussex, is the managing director of an events company

MY JOB, which involves organising functions and concerts, is very physical. I'm often on my feet all day and sometimes have to muck in and carry heavy equipment.

About four years ago I began suffering excruciating pain in my lower back across my hips. I struggled on but I was living on a diet of strong painkillers.

I'm an avid surfer but had to give up my hobby and was hobbling around feeling miserable. I consulted an osteopath and a chiropractor but my back problem only got worse. Eventually I returned to my GP and demanded a scan which showed I had a prolapsed disc.

Surgery was recommended but I wasn't keen to be cut open and began looking at other options.

Eventually I went for an IDD consultation which was being offered at the clinic where I'd had osteopathy.

It seemed perfect for my condition and after doing

more research in January I began a course of 20 treatments spread over six weeks. It wasn't painful although it did feel a bit strange to be strapped in having my back stretched.

After a few weeks I could feel an improvement and by the end of the course the pain was gone.

Part of my package involved rehabilitation and I was given exercises to do at home including lots of stretching to build up my core strength.

I felt able to get back on my surfboard straightaway but didn't want to jeopardise my recovery. However three months later I was back in the waves in quite high surf and also playing football.

The treatment cost me £1,500 but what price for being free of back pain? I still get the occasional twinge but I feel as though I've been given a new lease of life.

For more information about IDD visit [www.sussexbackpainclinic.co.uk](http://www.sussexbackpainclinic.co.uk) or call 01273 725667. For other centres in the UK offering the treatment call 0345 6252 566.

FOR hundreds of years traction, involving the use of weights to pull the spine, was offered as a cure for chronic back pain. However as studies cast doubt on its benefits the treatment went out of fashion and today it is rarely used.

Now a new therapy is available based on the principles of traction but applying modern technology to target the injured back more efficiently and gently.

It's hoped that IDD (Intervertebral Differential Dynamics therapy) will provide a middle ground between manual treatments and surgery.

Although only offered so far by a handful of clinics in the UK and not on the NHS, IDD is aimed at chronic back conditions such as prolapsed or slipped discs and sciatica which affect up to one million people each year in the UK.

Many back problems are caused by poor posture, lifting heavy loads and over-exertion. Often it is just a case of straining a muscle and the injury will clear up in a few days.

For some patients however, the discs in the back are damaged which leads to long-term pain.

These discs act as shock absorbers, containing a jelly-like substance which can bulge out if they become compressed, causing pressure on nerves.

Minor problems can be treated with a visit to the physiotherapist, osteopath or chiropractor but more serious conditions don't always respond to those treatments.

IDD uses computer-guided technology and a technique called distraction to draw apart the spine's vertebrae and target the damaged discs.

This in turn relieves pressure on the compressed discs and over a series of sessions reduces the bulge and allows healing to begin.

"It is based on the same process used in traction of releasing pressure by stretching the back but it's much more accurate," says Steve Morris of Sussex Back Pain Clinic in Hove, East Sussex, which offers IDD.

"It's not a miracle cure for back pain but for some

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conditions it offers a bridge between manual treatments and surgery. IDD offers an extra level of choice and could be an alternative to invasive surgery. "The risks with IDD are very low and we have seen some good success stories in terms of reducing back pain."

Back pain is estimated to cost the UK economy £2 billion a year through lost working days.

**M**ORE independent research is needed but one trial of IDD published in the European Musculoskeletal Review showed a 92 per cent success rate in patients who had been told they would require surgery. IDD, which was developed in America, is normally an option for patients who have suffered pain for more than three months

and haven't responded to other treatments. During sessions lasting 25 minutes each, patients are placed in a harness on a treatment table and the back is gradually stretched. The level of force used depends on the severity of the back condition and the patient's weight. The maximum stretch is held for one minute at a time then reduced. This cycle is repeated throughout the session. Unlike traditional traction, which can be traced back to ancient Egyptian times and spawned many weird and wonderful contraptions, IDD targets specific discs rather than the whole spine. During the treatment the back can be stretched in different directions according to the type of injury. A typical package, costing £1,500, involves 20 sessions spread over six weeks followed by a rehabilitation programme.