Automated Voice: The views and opinions expressed on this program are not necessarily those of the Accent Radio Network or the staff, management, and sponsors of this radio station.

Music Interlude:

Greg Allen: And welcome to this hour of the Right Balance on Accent radio network over the air and on the internet. Music in the background from the French Cookin Blues Band, a great band out of New York City, check them out when they play in the Garage, BB Kings, and other places in town. An hour – let’s see, later on in this hour, among our scheduled guests, the former governor by a couple of days now former governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee. Who I hope throws his hat into the ring because I think he’s a very, very qualified man, I think he’d make a heck of a good president. Right now, as regular members of our audience know, when we're not talking politics, we do talk health and I'd be willing to bet we’ve got a lot of listeners right now of all age groups and all political stripes who are going to want to listen for the next few minutes to what we’re going to be talking about. The book is “I've got your back: the truth about spine surgery straight from a surgeon” and the surgeon in question happens to be the chief of spinal surgery at Jacobi Medical Center in New York City, so the qualifications are there certainly. Dr. Nathaniel Tindel welcome to the show. I know so many people who have had back problems. Gender doesn't matter, age doesn't matter even weight at times doesn't matter, I know thin people with back problems. Can I ask you - obviously, from an under-educated person point of view - that's why I'm glad you're on - when it comes to the spine, and when it comes to back problems, is there one area that dominates when it comes to something going wrong?

Dr. Tindel: Well you know, one of the problems about the back is that, and one of the reasons why so many people have so many problems with their back, is that there's so many moving parts, and the other problem is that they really weren't designed to be standing or walking or sitting we were designed to be walking on all four limbs.

Greg Allen: Now I should point out Francine thinks I actually do walk on all four limbs and I am in fact the missing link. I’m just pointing that out. Ok.

Dr. Tindel: The fact is, that nobody really knows for sure what causes back pain, in fact I'd estimate that in over 85% of patients who have back pain, even if we made it our life's work, we would never know for sure what the cause of their pain was. And that really gets to the heart of the matter. If we don't know what's causing the pain, can surgery like a spinal fusion a disc replacement, or laminectomy cure it, and the answer most of the time, in my opinion; no.

Greg Allen: One thing I have found out about those, my father had horrific back problems for example, is that sometimes the cure is actually worse than what you have at the moment, that the surgery can create more problems than you already have.

Dr. Tindel: That's correct, and I spend a lot of time in my book discussing all of the potential complications that can occur not only during the surgery itself or immediately afterwards, but months and years later that people don't realize they're getting into when they sign up for surgery.

Greg Allen: Well I had knee problems, quite a few years ago and I had a choice, and I got two different opinions on the situation, and I decided not to get an operation and guess what; except under extreme conditions my knee is fine. The surgery could have given me more problems and disconnects in a much smaller way to what you're talking about I think it's very, very important for the people out there for the patient to realize that they have choices too and I am a big believer in the second opinion and I'm certain you are as well.

Dr. Tindel: Absolutely, I spend also quite a bit of time talking about the benefits of second and even third opinions and what amazes me is that when people come to see me, how many different opinions they already have about the same condition. And so, it's a very confusing situation for many patients when they have a particular condition and it seems that it would just be one treatment option but when you go to see one doctor and then another it turns out you get a variety of different opinions. We have a saying that if you put five spine surgeons in a room with a particular problem you'll get six different opinions.

Greg Allen: I've said, and bear with me doctor because I think this makes sense in terms of what you're talking about, when it comes to the word expert - I've talked about this many times on our show - let's say you need to know a hundred things about something to know something. If you know five things about something and the average person only knows one thing, then you’re the expert; you know five times more than the other guy but you still don't know - you still don't know 95 things, that's my point about that dangerous word; expert.

Dr. Tindel: Well you pointed out something very interesting with regards to your knee and if you don't mind I'd like to elaborate on that, I think as receivers of medical care in a lot of respects we've come to or become accustomed to our doctors and surgeons curing certain problems and actually a knee problem is usually  a problem that can be cured with surgery whether a meniscal tear or an ACL injury, or a hernia problem, you go to your surgeon he or she fixes the problem, and you're done with it. And it's a fairly straightforward process but that’s not the case with back problems and often times people walk into the situations, into their doctor's office thinking that their doctor's going to take over and fix their problem and they're going to be left with no more pain and no more problem and unfortunately, it's not quite that simple.

Greg Allen: Let’s do this, we've got to get away for a break. Doctor, on the other side of this break; what is sciatica? That's the question. The book in question; “I've got your back” - back in a flash.

Music interlude:

Greg Allen: I love Cajun and Zydeco, I truly, truly do. We are the Right Balance on the Accent Radio Network. A little bit later on this hour we’ll be speaking with Governor Mike Huckabee, recently left office in Arkansas, I hope he runs for president we’ll talk about that as well. Right now, we're talking about a fascinating book that I'm certain transcends politics, liberals and conservatives alike, will want to know about “I've got your back: the truth about spine surgery straight from a surgeon”, the surgeon being our guest Dr. Nathaniel Tindel, the chief of spinal surgery at the Jacobi Medical Center in New York City. Sciatica sounds like something, oh I had a great veal sciatica at my favorite Italian restaurant, but the fact is it's something very, very painful. What is sciatica?

Dr. Tindel: It's one of the most commonly misunderstood problems when it comes to back issues. Sciatica refers to pain that shoots down the leg it doesn't necessarily refer to back pain or any other types of pain but it’s the sharp shooting pain that people describe that runs down the leg and it's usually one leg but it can be both legs.

Greg Allen: Any idea what the what actually causes it? Is a dehydration, for example?

Dr. Tindel: No, No, sciatica has some very specific causes and the most common cause is a herniated disc and if you don't mind I just want to take a few moments and explain to the listeners what a herniated disc is because that is also very commonly misunderstood. A lot of people think the disc, which is the soft tissue between the two bones in your back, is kind of like either a pancake or a hamburger and when it slips out of place it's kind of like the hamburger falling off a grill. But it's not that at all, in fact it's more like a jelly doughnut and when you think of it this way you can really understand what a herniated disc is. A herniated disc is what happens when you pick up the doughnut and bite into it and the jelly runs down the side of your cheek. That's the herniated disc, the jelly inside the donut is released, or herniates, and actually as a result of the fact that it’s not where it’s supposed be, it starts to put pressure on a nerve. In the old days they used to use the term ‘slipped disc’. And I actually like that term better because it really does describe what's happening. Actually, even a better term would be ‘pinched nerve’ because what's happening is the disc slips and it's pinching the nerve up against the bone, and when it squeezes that nerve, it causes the pain that runs down the leg.

Greg Allen: Let's talk about surgery for all these conditions if you will, to me, with anything involving a knife you need more than one opinion, so on and so forth. In your book you certainly suggest, in fact, right on the cover it says in 19 out of 20 cases there is an alternative to back surgery why do you believe that most of the time there is an alternative? Because obviously you perform these operations, you obviously know your stuff, how do you draw this conclusion?

Dr. Tindel: Because it’s what the literature shows us, what the medical literature tells us in the last 5 to 10 years, the world of back surgery has come into the present day reality of having very well controlled studies. These studies are just starting to come out, these are studies that are done with lots of patients, lots of diligence and under strict control and guidelines. We are just beginning to understand that some of the surgeries we do don’t work out as well as we thought they might have.

Greg Allen: Of the surgeries that work better, what are they?

Dr. Tindel: Well, let’s say you got thrown off your motorcycle going 60 miles an hours and you broke you back and you ended up in a trauma center with an unstable spinal fracture, that’s a great opportunity to talk to your spine surgeon about spine surgery. If your child has scoliosis, that’s another condition. We just talked about a herniated disc with shooting pain down the leg, that’s a very good reason, if you’ve tried all the other alternatives that I talk about in the book and they don’t work, to consider spine surgery. There are plenty of conditions that surgery works real well and is predictable, but there are plenty of where it doesn’t.

Greg Allen: As it relates to pain management, you hear with a toothache, for example, some doctors say take aspirin, some take ibuprofen and someone else will say acetaminophen. When it comes to this far more serious situation of the back for the everyday person who may have been lifting something and all of sudden there is back pain, what’s the best thing for them to do?

Dr. Tindel: Well let me comment of something you just to take some aspirin. You know the old saying: take two aspirin and call me in the morning? I don’t know any physicians these days that are actually recommending two regular aspirin anymore. Aspirin is actually a blood thinner and it’s not recommended. Some doctors do recommend a baby aspirin for heart issues which is not my area but we actually don’t recommend aspirin for pain management. In fact, aspirin is not a very good pain reliever. But the good news, to get to the question you asked about back pain, is that most patients who suffer back pain, and there is a lot of them, there are literally millions of people who have back pain, right now, in this country, is that most of the time it gets better in about 6 weeks. That is true no matter what you do, it just gets better. It’s what you call a self-limited process.

Greg Allen: In other words, like the common cold, give yourself 7 to 10 days and your over it.

Dr. Tindel: That’s right.

Greg Allen: isn’t that funny how the body works?

Dr. Tindel: It’s amazing.

Greg Allen: It really is. God did an amazing thing. We have to cut away for a break in a couple of seconds Dr. Tindel but on the other side of this break I have some more questions for you. For example, with everyday back pain: heat and cold, cold and heat: what makes sense. Back in a flash.

Guitar Music

Greg allen: What a great guitar player, out of Germany of all places, the great (name difficult to discern something like lori Hilton) a brilliant player in the peter green/Fleetwood mac school. We are the Right Balance on the Accent Radio Network folks: I could not recommend a book more. The being I’ve Got Your Back: The Truth About Spine Surgery, Straight from a surgeon and that surgeon is Dr. Nathaniel Tindel, the chief of spinal surgery at Jacobi Medical Center in the Big Apple. Prior to that break, doctor, I was asking about heat and cold as it relates to back pain. Is it similar to muscle pain, you sort of alternate them. Is one better for the other. Do both of them work? Both of them don’t work? What is the answer?

Dr. Tindel: Well it all depends on what is actually causing the pain. If it’s the kind of pain you get after lifting your air conditioner and putting it in the window, that’s usually a self-limiting condition and I have found that some patients respond to heat and others respond to cold and I have had patients tell me that they try cold and then apply heat. My advice to most patients is: try it and see if it works. If it works, do it. You are not going to hurt yourself with it, the only caution I advise is, especially with heat, is not to leave a hot pack on the back too long because I have actually had patients come in with burnt skin. The same applies to cold, you don’t want to apply ice directly to the back, you can get a burn from the actual cold.

Greg Allen: Now in going over your book last night, I did not see anything on this subject but then again I didn’t read it from page to page, I simply didn’t have the time. I’m usually very thorough in my prep for the guests obviously and I don’t know if you cover it or not, but it would seem to me as a civilian that when it comes to back pain and the spine the type of shoes you wear would have some connection, if you will, to how your spine and back basically feel. A bad shoe can do damage it would seem.

Dr. Tindel: Well, I think you are right and although I don’t cover it in the book, I think a well fitting and comfortable shoe is important. I actually recommend most of my patients to wear sneakers if they have any shoe issues and/or back pain because a sneaker is a great shoe and if it fits well, it will be just fine.

Greg Allen: Now lets talk about some of the types of surgery and nonsurgical alternatives out there. What are some of the things that may not be known by the audience that is they are experiencing back pain right now they may have been told the traditional way is, what are some of the alternatives?

Dr. Tindel: A good place to start is with a herniated disc. The interesting thing about a herniated disc is, and it’s really an amazing fact, is that few people are aware that 20% of people under the age of 60 have one and don’t even know it. Which means that one in five people have no problems with their back and yet if we looked at them with an MRI scan or a special study, we would actually find a herniated disc. Why some of these people develop pain and problems related to their disc is still one of the enigmas about back problems and yet if you do have a herniated disc and you do have the right symptoms, which is sciatic, which we talked about a few minutes ago, then there is a series of steps you can go through to get rid of your pain and if doesn’t work, then it’s time to start considering surgery. But I don’t think surgery should be the first option at all since most of these people do get better.

Greg Allen: Let me ask you one of the questions that came from a listener while I was checking the email during the last commercial break: What about slant boards for back pain?

Dr. Tindel: I think slant boards are a symptomatic reliever but there is no scientific evidence to support that they actually work in randomized, control study.

Greg Allen: What about nutrition? If you have pain and want to remain healthy for example, there are things you can do for your brain, and for your cholesterol and so forth. Maybe this is a naïve question from my part: Is there anything nutritionally that relates to the spine and the back that basically increases the odds of having a healthy spine, for lack of a better phrase?

Dr. Tindel: I couldn’t agree with you more. I think a well balanced, health and nutritious diet is important but there are no specific dietary supplements that are recommended but I think keeping a well balance diet is the most important thing.

Greg Allen: Now as it relates to the surgeries you do perform and do believe are necessary, most of the time what are these surgeries, specifically.

Dr. Tindel: It’s a good question and at the heart of the book and it comes down to what is causing the patient’s problem. There are so many different conditions that affect any particular patient, you have to take them individually. So we talked about a herniated disc and sciatica but if we take it one step further a lot of people have herniated discs and come see me or their doctor with just back pain and this is a very different scenario. Trying to cure back pain, and I’m using that phrase quite specifically, to separate it from the sciatic pain that we just talked about with surgery is with no where near as reliable and in fact is frought with all sorts of complications.

Greg Allen: In terms of, I don’t know if anybody has asked you this, so here it goes, it would seem to me that with what you do, and correct me if I’m wrong, is it safe to say that the spine is in a sense we know its physically connected connected to the brain but would you say it’s actually realistically an extension of the brain so we have to be carefully because whatever giggles the spine, may have something to do with what we have between our ears.

Dr. Tindel: Absolutely. Dr Jon Sarno about 15 years ago started to write a series of books about tension myositis and I think they are an excellent source for people who what to look into that further and understand the connection between pain and the brain and he’s done an excellent job educating the consumer about that. What my book does it takes off where his book leaves you which is if you do have a back problem, what do you do now? The connection there is so complicated and we know so little about it, that its’ really an area we need to spend a lot more time, in terms of medical research to understand it better.

Greg Allen: We are speaking with Dr. Nathaniel Tindel, he happens to be the Chief of Spinal Surgery at Jacobi Medical Center in New York City, the book being I’ve Got Your back, subtitled, the truth about spine surgery, straight from a surgeon. Nathaniel, thank you for coming aboard. We have about a minute left. I don’t want to pretend to come up with every brilliant question or observation, is there any parting shot from you?

Dr. Tindel: I would tell you that for anyone who has a serious back problem or if there is anybody who is thinking about having a procedure for the back, whether it’s an injection or surgery, get my book and read it. It’s literally a three hour consultation with your very own private surgeon and it’s well worth the book, I think it’s selling for $14.00, which is probably less than most patients co-pay and I think you will get a lot out of it.

Greg Allen: Well I did. It really is excellent. I don’t say this all the time but I do a pretty good job of weeding the good from the bad books and the bad books tend not to get on our show and I am something of a health nut as regular listeners know. Dr. Tindel, this book is highly recommended by me. I think you have done right by the consumer, if you will, the medical consumer. Thank you. We are the Right Balance.