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Kaye no longer stooped so low

Cathy O'Leary
Medical Editor

Kaye Burrows would probably send a metal detector into overdrive after her severely crooked spine was rebuilt with dozens of nuts and bolts.

The 72-year-old Canning Vale woman was so stooped over with a scoliosis deformity that her rib cage touched her pelvis. But a new type of surgery, which involved dozens of screws and rods being inserted into her back with mechanical precision, has been life-changing.

Mrs Burrows is one of the first West Australians to have the procedure, which was performed by spine surgeon Paul Taylor at Mount Hospital.

She said her back problems emerged in her 20s and she had been in chronic pain for a decade.

Before her operation, Mrs Burrows had a 45-degree stoop and could barely walk more than a few metres.

"I had almost given up hope as I had tried so many painkillers and treatments," she said. "But now I'm walking several kilometres a day, unassisted and pain-free.

"I'm standing upright for the first time in decades. I didn't think it was possible for me to live like this."

The minimally invasive operation involved anterior lumbar fusion and screws being inserted using small

stab-like incisions to help realign her spinal column.

Mr Taylor is one of the first Australian surgeons to carry out such complex surgery, done in combination with virtual reality software to guide the use of rods and achieve the right bend to match the normal curve of the spine.

"The advantage of this surgery is that it reduces the amount of tissue damage when compared with the traditional surgery technique, which was to open up the patient from top to bottom to remove all muscle from the bone and create room for the screws and rods," he said.

"So not only is this less painful and without so much blood loss, we're getting excellent outcomes for people like Mrs Burrows."



Her spine after the surgery.



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Kaye Burrows is standing upright for the first time in decades. Picture: Simon Santi