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8	IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
9	FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
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11	STEVEN GEORGE HARPER, No. CIV S-10-2819-CMK
12	Plaintiff,
13	vs. <u>MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER</u>
14	COMMISSIONER OF SOCIAL SECURITY,
15	Defendant.
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18	Plaintiff, who is proceeding with retained counsel, brings this action for judicial
19	review of a final decision of the Commissioner of Social Security under 42 U.S.C. § 405(g).
20	Pursuant to the written consent of all parties, this case is before the undersigned as the presiding
21	judge for all purposes, including entry of final judgment. See 28 U.S.C. § 636(c). Pending
22	before the court are plaintiff's motion for summary judgment (Doc. 24) and defendant's cross-
23	motion for summary judgment (Doc. 28).
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1	I. PROCEDURAL HISTORY		
2	Plainti	ff applied for social security benefits on June 18, 2008. In the application,	
3	plaintiff claims that di	sability began on March 12, 2008. Plaintiff claims that disability is caused	
4	by a combination of "	severe L5-S1 foraminal stenosis, moderate left-sided L5-S1 foraminal	
5	stenosis, degenerative	disc disease, obesity, sleep apnea, and bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome."	
6	Plaintiff claims these	impairments give rise to "debilitating symptoms including chronic pain,	
7	lift/carry limitations, sit/stand/walk limitations, manipulative limitations, difficulty sleeping at		
8	night, daytime somnolence, and the need for day time naps." Plaintiff's claim was initially		
9	denied. Following de	nial of reconsideration, plaintiff requested an administrative hearing, which	
10	was held on Decembe	r 1, 2009, before Administrative Law Judge ("ALJ") L. Kalei Fong. In an	
11	April 21, 2010, decision, the ALJ concluded that plaintiff is not disabled based on the following		
12	relevant findings:		
13	1.	The claimant has the following severe impairments: lumbar degenerative disc disease, sleep apnea, left knee bursitis, left shoulder impingement, and	
14		mild bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome;	
15	2.	The claimant does not have an impairment or combination of impairments that meets or medically equals one of the impairments listed in the	
16		regulations;	
17	3.	The claimant has the residual functional capacity to perform light work; specifically, the claimant can lift or carry 20 pounds occasionally, 10	
18		pounds frequently; stand, walk, and sit (with normal breaks) about 6 hours in an 8-hour work day; his ability to push or pull is unlimited in the lower	
19		extremities and he is able to climb (but no ladders, ropes, or scaffolds); he can also balance, stoop, kneel, crouch, and crawl on an occasional basis;	
20		he is limited to occasional overhead reaching with the left upper extremity and he can occasionally perform gross and fine manipulation with both	
21		hands; he has no other manipulative, visual, communicative, or environmental limitations; and	
22	4.	Considering the claimant's age, education, work experience, residual	
23		functional capacity, and vocational expert testimony, there are jobs that exist in significant numbers in the national economy that the claimant can	
24		perform.	
25	After the Appeals Cou	incil declined review on August 17, 2010, this appeal followed.	
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II.

1	II. SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE	
2	The certified administrative record ("CAR") contains the following relevant	
3	evidence, summarized chronologically below: ¹	
4	July 26, 2008 – Agency examining doctor Kenneth Johnson, M.D., reported on a	
5	comprehensive orthopedic evaluation. Plaintiff listed low back pain, bilateral hand pain, left	
6	neck and shoulder pain, and left knee pain as his chief complaints. Dr. Johnson reported the	
7	following history:	
8 9	The claimant is a 48-year-old white male, who was employed in the roofing business for over 20 years. He presented with multiple complaints, as noted above, from prolonged work activities and other injuries. The claimant stated that he continued in the roofing business	
10	until March 11th [2008]. His symptoms have precluded continued work.	
11	The doctor noted that, despite plaintiff's pain symptoms, "the claimant is still independent with	
12	mobility, self care, and activities of daily living, without an assistive device or need for durable	
13	medical equipment." At the time of the evaluation, plaintiff's only medication was over-the-	
14	counter Tylenol. Plaintiff was taking no prescription medication for any condition. Following an	
15	objective evaluation, Dr. Johnson provided the following functional assessment:	
16 17	The claimant can be expected to stand and walk for at least six hours during an eight-hour workday, with postural adjustments needed for the back and knee.	
18	The claimant can be expected to sit without restrictions, with postural adjustments needed for the back and knee.	
19 20	The claimant is safe to ambulate without an assistive device.	
21	The claimant can lift and carry 10 pounds or less frequently and 20 to 25 pounds occasionally. The claimant should be able to lift 50 pounds and 100 pounds occasionally without carrying.	
22 23	The claimant can perform occasional bending, stooping, and crouching.	
24	The claimant can perform occasional reaching, handling, feeling, grasping, and fingering of items.	
25 26	¹ The court adopts plaintiff's summary of the treatment records, which is not repeated here.	

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The claimant has no relevant visual, communicative, or workplace environmental limitations.

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3 August 21, 2008 – Agency consultative doctor H. Crowhurst, M.D., submitted a 4 physical residual functional capacity assessment. Dr. Crowhurst opined that plaintiff could 5 occasionally lift and carry 20 pounds and frequently lift and carry 10 pounds. Plaintiff could sit/stand/walk for six hours in an eight-hour workday. Plaintiff's ability to push/pull was found 6 7 to be unlimited. In support of these findings, the doctor cited "[c]hronic back pain, left knee pain, left shoulder impingement." Plaintiff could occasionally perform all postural activities, 8 9 except he should never balance. As to manipulative limitations, Dr. Crowhurst concluded that 10 plaintiff was limited in his ability to reach in all directions, handle, and finger. Plaintiff's feeling 11 ability was unlimited. The doctor explained that plaintiff was capable of occasional overhead reaching with the left upper extremity, and occasional gross and fine manipulation with both 12 13 hands. No visual, environmental, or communicative limitations were noted. 14 October 2, 2008 – Plaintiff submitted an Exertion Ouestionnaire. He stated that he lives in a house with his life-long partner. As to things he does on an average day, plaintiff 15 16 stated: 17 When I try to vacuum or do dishes I have to sit down a lot. It makes my lower back hurt. It hurts to the point that it makes it unable to 18 do them. I have to go and sit on the couch. 19 Plaintiff stated that he experiences low back pain if he walks even one block. Plaintiff stated that 20 he cannot climb stairs and can only lift very light items, though he stated that he carries his 21 groceries. As to yard work, plaintiff stated that he only turns on the sprinklers and that he is 22 unable to do any other yard chores since his disability began. He added that he sleeps poorly and 23 often has to take naps during the day. He did not state whether or not he used assistive devices. 24 Finally, plaintiff stated: 25 ...[M]y condition is getting worse with every day. The pain is unbearable at times. It makes it impossible for me to do any kind of work. 26

1	January 11, 2010 – Treating physician David E. Damazo, M.D., submitted a	
2	medical source statement. While the doctor offered a diagnosis, he did not cite to any objective	
3	findings.	
4	May 20, 2010 – Plaintiff's treating physician, Dr. Damazo, submitted a letter	
5	regarding plaintiff's disability claim. The doctor stated:	
6	I am writing this letter on behalf of Steven Harper to document the amount of disability that this man is experiencing. I have taken care of Steven	
7	Harper since January 2010. He has a history of working as a roofer for 20 years. He has a history of back pain to a bothersome extent for 15 years	
8	and back pain to a severe extent for 6 years. The back pain is across the low back and will radiate to the buttocks and lateral thighs. There is also	
9	numbness that radiates to the lateral thighs. He feels he can sit a maximum of 5 minutes, stand a maximum of 5 minutes, and lift less than	
10	15 lbs.	
11	On physical exam he does have radiculopathy signs with a positive Lasegue. Also, a lumbar spine MRI has been performed. This MRI is	
12	significant for severe right L5-S1 foraminal stenosis and moderate lift- sided L5-S1 foraminal stenosis that relates to discogenic change. In	
13	summary, this is a man with back pain who does have documented severe back disease.	
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15	III. STANDARD OF REVIEW	
16	The court reviews the Commissioner's final decision to determine whether it is:	
17	(1) based on proper legal standards; and (2) supported by substantial evidence in the record as a	
18 19	whole. See Tackett v. Apfel, 180 F.3d 1094, 1097 (9th Cir. 1999). "Substantial evidence" is	
20	more than a mere scintilla, but less than a preponderance. See Saelee v. Chater, 94 F.3d 520, 521	
20	(9th Cir. 1996). It is " such evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to	
21	support a conclusion." <u>Richardson v. Perales</u> , 402 U.S. 389, 402 (1971). The record as a whole,	
22	including both the evidence that supports and detracts from the Commissioner's conclusion, must	
23 24	be considered and weighed. See Howard v. Heckler, 782 F.2d 1484, 1487 (9th Cir. 1986); Jones	
25	v. Heckler, 760 F.2d 993, 995 (9th Cir. 1985). The court may not affirm the Commissioner's	
26	decision simply by isolating a specific quantum of supporting evidence. See Hammock v.	
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4 Therefore, where the evidence is susceptible to more than one rational interpretation, one of 5 which supports the Commissioner's decision, the decision must be affirmed, see Thomas v. Barnhart, 278 F.3d 947, 954 (9th Cir. 2002), and may be set aside only if an improper legal 6 7 standard was applied in weighing the evidence, see Burkhart v. Bowen, 856 F.2d 1335, 1338 (9th Cir. 1988). 8 9 10 **IV. DISCUSSION** 11 In his motion for summary judgment, plaintiff argues: (1) the ALJ failed to develop the record; (2) the Appeals Council failed to properly evaluate new evidence; (3) the 12 13 ALJ failed to evaluate plaintiff's obesity; (4) the ALJ improperly rejected plaintiff's testimony as not credible; and (5) the ALJ improperly relied on vocational expert testimony which was not 14 15 based on an accurate description of plaintiff's limitations. 16 **Duty to Develop the Record** A. 17 The ALJ has an independent duty to fully and fairly develop the record and assure that the claimant's interests are considered. See Tonapetyan v. Halter, 242 F.3d 1144, 1150 (9th 18 19 Cir. 2001). When the claimant is not represented by counsel, this duty requires the ALJ to be 20 especially diligent in seeking all relevant facts. See id. This requires the ALJ to "scrupulously 21 and conscientiously probe into, inquire of, and explore for all the relevant facts." Cox v. Califano, 587 F.2d 988, 991 (9th Cir. 1978). Ambiguous evidence or the ALJ's own finding that 22 23 the record is inadequate triggers this duty. See Tonapetyan, 242 F.3d at 1150. The ALJ may discharge the duty to develop the record by subpoening the claimant's physicians, submitting 24 25 questions to the claimant's physicians, continuing the hearing, or keeping the record open after the hearing to allow for supplementation of the record. See id. (citing Tidwell v. Apfel, 161 F.3d 26 6

Bowen, 879 F.2d 498, 501 (9th Cir. 1989). If substantial evidence supports the administrative

findings, or if there is conflicting evidence supporting a particular finding, the finding of the

Commissioner is conclusive. See Sprague v. Bowen, 812 F.2d 1226, 1229-30 (9th Cir. 1987).

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599, 602 (9th Cir. 1998)).

2 Plaintiff argues: "Despite the state of the opinion evidence, the ALJ failed to order 3 an updated consultative examination in order to fully develop the record regarding Mr. Harper's 4 RFC in light of the medical treatment and radiological evidence generated after Drs. Johnson and Crowhurst had formulated their RFC opinions." The court does not agree that error occurred. 5 The duty to develop the record is triggered only where the existing evidence is either ambiguous 6 7 or inadequate. Such was not the case here. The evidence of record at the time of the 8 administrative hearing was clear and adequate to allow the ALJ to make a disability 9 determination.²

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B. Evaluation by Appeals Council

11 Plaintiff argues that the Appeals Council erred by summarily rejecting the opinions of Dr. Damazo, which were submitted for the first time in connection with plaintiff's 12 13 appeal from the hearing decision. According to plaintiff: "Given the nature of the new evidence, and the fact that neither of the physicians' opinions upon which the ALJ relied were informed by 14 15 the 2008 MRI evidence and any of the medical evidence after August of 2008, the Appeal 16 Council should have afforded the ALJ an opportunity to evaluate the new evidence, and if 17 necessary develop the record by ordering an updated consultative examination...." Defendant argues that the Appeals Council is only required to review a case upon submission of new 18 19 evidence not originally before the ALJ when the Appeal Council finds that the ALJ's decision is 20 contrary to the weight of the evidence as a whole, including the new evidence. Defendant states 21 that, because the Appeals Council concluded that the late-submitted evidence did not render the

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As discussed below, plaintiff did in fact submit additional evidence to the Appeals
 Council as part of his appeal from the ALJ's hearing decision. Thus, to the extent post-hearing
 evidence existed that the ALJ did not review, such evidence was adduced to the Appeals Council which concluded that the new evidence did not alter the ALJ's analysis. Therefore, even though
 the ALJ did not consider certain pieces of post-hearing evidence the Appeals Council did. In

the ALJ did not consider certain pieces of post-hearing evidence, the Appeals Council did. In other words, plaintiff had the opportunity to develop the record himself by submitting the post-hearing evidence to the Appeals Council for its review.

ALJ's hearing decision contrary to the entire record, it properly considered Dr. Damazo's
 opinions.

The court agrees with defendant. Specifically, a review of Dr. Damazo's January and May 2010 documents reveals that the doctor merely recited plaintiff's subjective complaints without offering his own medical opinion based on minimal, if any, subjective findings. Where subjective findings are noted (i.e., in the May 2010 letter), no opinion as to the effect of these findings on plaintiff's ability to work is rendered. There simply was nothing in Dr. Damazo's 2010 documents which undermined the ALJ's hearing decision.

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C.

Plaintiff's Obesity

In 1999, obesity was removed from the Listing of Impairments.³ Obesity may still 10 11 enter into a multiple impairment analysis, but "only by dint of its impact upon the claimant's musculoskeletal, respiratory, or cardiovascular system." Celaya v. Halter, 332 F.3d 1177, 1181 12 13 n.1 (9th Cir. 2003). Thus, as part of his duty to develop the record, the ALJ is required to consider obesity in a multiple impairment analysis, but only where it is "clear from the record 14 15 that [the plaintiff's] obesity . . . could exacerbate her reported illnesses." Id. at 1182; see also 16 Burch v. Barnhart, 400 F.3d 676, 682 (9th Cir. 2005) (distinguishing Celaya and concluding that 17 a multiple impairment analysis is not required where "the medical record is silent as to whether 18 and how claimant's obesity might have exacerbated her condition" and "the claimant did not 19 present any testimony or other evidence . . . that her obesity impaired her ability to work").

Plaintiff argues that, despite evidence in the record that he is obese, and despite
the ALJ's statement that he was not reducing his weight as instructed by his doctors, "the ALJ
failed to discuss what, if any, additional impact Mr. Harper's obesity had on his ability to
perform sustained work activity." As in <u>Burch</u>, the court finds no error because plaintiff has not

 ³ Under SSR 02-01p, a person with body mass index ("BMI") of 30 or above is considered obese. BMI is the ratio of an individual's weight in kilograms to the square of height in meters (weight divided by square of height).

presented any evidence indicating that his weight impairs his ability to work. While treating
 doctors have advised plaintiff to reduce his weight, there is no evidence that any doctor opined
 that plaintiff's weight was having a negative impact on his ability to work.

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D. <u>Plaintiff's Credibility</u>

5 The Commissioner determines whether a disability applicant is credible, and the court defers to the Commissioner's discretion if the Commissioner used the proper process and 6 7 provided proper reasons. See Saelee v. Chater, 94 F.3d 520, 522 (9th Cir. 1996). An explicit credibility finding must be supported by specific, cogent reasons. See Rashad v. Sullivan, 903 8 9 F.2d 1229, 1231 (9th Cir. 1990). General findings are insufficient. See Lester v. Chater, 81 F.3d 821, 834 (9th Cir. 1995). Rather, the Commissioner must identify what testimony is not credible 10 11 and what evidence undermines the testimony. See id. Moreover, unless there is affirmative evidence in the record of malingering, the Commissioner's reasons for rejecting testimony as not 12 13 credible must be "clear and convincing." See id.; see also Carmickle v. Commissioner, 533 F.3d 1155, 1160 (9th Cir. 2008) (citing Lingenfelter v Astrue, 504 F.3d 1028, 1936 (9th Cir. 2007), 14 15 and Gregor v. Barnhart, 464 F.3d 968, 972 (9th Cir. 2006)). 16 If there is objective medical evidence of an underlying impairment, the 17 Commissioner may not discredit a claimant's testimony as to the severity of symptoms merely 18 because they are unsupported by objective medical evidence. See Bunnell v. Sullivan, 947 F.2d 19 341, 347-48 (9th Cir. 1991) (en banc). As the Ninth Circuit explained in Smolen v. Chater: 20 The claimant need not produce objective medical evidence of the [symptom] itself, or the severity thereof. Nor must the claimant produce 21 objective medical evidence of the causal relationship between the medically determinable impairment and the symptom. By requiring that the medical impairment "could reasonably be expected to produce" pain or 22 another symptom, the Cotton test requires only that the causal relationship

80 F.3d 1273, 1282 (9th Cir. 1996) (referring to the test established in <u>Cotton v. Bowen</u>, 799 F.2d 1403 (9th Cir. 1986)).

be a reasonable inference, not a medically proven phenomenon.

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1 The Commissioner may, however, consider the nature of the symptoms alleged, 2 including aggravating factors, medication, treatment, and functional restrictions. See Bunnell, 3 947 F.2d at 345-47. In weighing credibility, the Commissioner may also consider: (1) the claimant's reputation for truthfulness, prior inconsistent statements, or other inconsistent 4 5 testimony; (2) unexplained or inadequately explained failure to seek treatment or to follow a prescribed course of treatment; (3) the claimant's daily activities; (4) work records; and (5) 6 7 physician and third-party testimony about the nature, severity, and effect of symptoms. See Smolen, 80 F.3d at 1284 (citations omitted). It is also appropriate to consider whether the 8 9 claimant cooperated during physical examinations or provided conflicting statements concerning 10 drug and/or alcohol use. See Thomas v. Barnhart, 278 F.3d 947, 958-59 (9th Cir. 2002). If the 11 claimant testifies as to symptoms greater than would normally be produced by a given impairment, the ALJ may disbelieve that testimony provided specific findings are made. See 12 13 Carmickle, 533 F.3d at 1161 (citing Swenson v. Sullivan, 876 F.2d 683, 687 (9th Cir. 1989)).

14 Regarding reliance on a claimant's daily activities to find testimony of disabling 15 pain not credible, the Social Security Act does not require that disability claimants be utterly 16 incapacitated. See Fair v. Bowen, 885 F.2d 597, 602 (9th Cir. 1989). The Ninth Circuit has 17 repeatedly held that the "... mere fact that a plaintiff has carried out certain daily activities ... does not . . . [necessarily] detract from her credibility as to her overall disability." See Orn v. 18 Astrue, 495 F.3d 625, 639 (9th Cir. 2007) (quoting Vertigan v. Heller, 260 F.3d 1044, 1050 (9th 19 20 Cir. 2001)); see also Howard v. Heckler, 782 F.2d 1484, 1488 (9th Cir. 1986) (observing that a 21 claim of pain-induced disability is not necessarily gainsaid by a capacity to engage in periodic 22 restricted travel); Gallant v. Heckler, 753 F.2d 1450, 1453 (9th Cir. 1984) (concluding that the 23 claimant was entitled to benefits based on constant leg and back pain despite the claimant's ability to cook meals and wash dishes); Fair, 885 F.2d at 603 (observing that "many home 24 25 activities are not easily transferable to what may be the more grueling environment of the 26 workplace, where it might be impossible to periodically rest or take medication"). Daily

1	activities must be such that they show that the claimant is "able to spend a substantial part of		
2	his day engaged in pursuits involving the performance of physical functions that are transferable		
3	to a work setting." <u>Fair</u> , 885 F.2d at 603. The ALJ must make specific findings in this regard		
4	before relying on daily activities to find a claimant's pain testimony not credible. See Burch v.		
5	Barnhart, 400 F.3d 676, 681 (9th Cir. 2005).		
6	Regarding plaintiff's credibility, the ALJ stated:		
7	The claimant testified that he is 48 years old, he earned a GED, and last		
8	worked in the roofing industry from 1997 to 2008 but has not worked since March 3, 2008. He lives with a friend. He has a history of		
9	incarcerations. He was fired from his job when the pain in his hands got bad. He indicated that he cannot work due to back, knee, hand numbness, and left shoulder pain which prevents him from working. He has been		
10	and left shoulder pain which prevents him from working. He has been treating with Dr. Baron since September 2009 and he was treated by John Stack a physician's assistant. He was also treated by Dr. Burke for		
11	Stack, a physician's assistant. He was also treated by Dr. Burke for degenerative disc and arthritis. Methadone treatments have helped a little. He also has sleep apnea which has not improved. He smokes one-half a		
12	pack of cigarettes a day. He also declined epidural treatment and he has had no physical therapy. Sometimes, he goes to the emergency room for		
13	pain. Methadone is helping a little.		
14	The claimant testified that his activities of daily living include waking up at 8 a.m., taking methadone, sitting on the couch, watching television, and		
15	he stopped driving about 6 months ago. His friend cooks and does the chores and cleaning. It hurts his back and legs to walk and he had no		
16	hobbies. He receives General Assistance/Relief which pays for the food and rent. He testified that his hand numbress prevents him from doing		
17	chores, using a computer for more than 3 or 4 minutes, he can sit for only a few minutes, walk a block, lift 10 to 20 pounds 1 or 2 times, and he		
18	sleeps about 4 hours a night because back pain wakes him up. Accordingly, he is drowsy during the day and occasionally nods off to		
19	sleep. Since July 2008 his back pain and hand numbness have gotten worse.		
20	After careful consideration of the evidence, the undersigned finds that the		
21	claimant's medically determinable impairments could reasonably be expected to cause the alleged symptoms; however, the claimant's		
22	statements concerning the intensity, persistence, and limiting effects of these symptoms are not credible to the extent they are inconsistent with the		
23	above residual functional capacity assessment.		
24	In terms of the claimant's alleged back pain, I find him less than fully credible. He was examined by a Board Certified physical medicine and		
25	rehabilitation physician who opined that he remains independent with mobility, self care, and activities of daily living (Ex. 2F/1). It was also		
26	opined that the claimant retains a good residual functional capacity for		
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basic work activity (Ex. 2F/4). Although the claimant alleges to the contrary (Ex. 1E; 6E), the undersigned finds no evidence of a need for future back surgery, and the claimant has sought almost no emergency care due to excess pain complaints. He testified that he is in constant pain but he has turned down alternative forms of treatment to relieve pain and he has not lost any weight since his alleged onset date against medical advice. Treatment notes reflect that the claimant was not taking prescribed medication, he was not doing prescribed range of motion or strengthening exercises, and he was not reducing his weight against medical advice (Ex. 13F/3, 4). Although the undersigned partly credits the claimant's allegations of pain, it is noted that the claimant was treated by a neurosurgeon whose ultimate medical opinion did not include a surgical option, there was no clinical or diagnostic radiculopathy, diagnosis included only mild bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome, he opined that the claimant has no peripheral neuropathy, and he observed no dynamic instability on back flexion and extension (Ex. 11F). The undersigned finds this reduces the claimant's credibility regarding the intensity of his subjective pain allegations.

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11 Plaintiff argues that none of the reasons cited by the ALJ for rejecting his testimony are 12 legitimate. First, he argues that the ALJ's statement that Dr. Johnson reported that plaintiff 13 remains independent with activities of daily living, mobility, and self-care mischaracterized the 14 doctor's report and that the ability to do such tasks at one's own pace does not necessarily 15 indicate an ability to perform work activities. Second, plaintiff argues that the ALJ misstated the 16 doctor's opinion by saying that Dr. Johnson concluded that plaintiff retains a "good residual 17 functional capacity for basic work activity." Third, plaintiff claims that the ALJ's finding that there was no evidence of a need for future back surgery does not equate to an absence of 18 19 debilitating pain. Fourth, plaintiff states that, contrary to the ALJ's suggestion that he turned 20 down alternative forms of treatment because he was not in fact experiencing disabling pain, 21 alternative treatment was turned down because he could not afford it. Fifth, plaintiff argues that 22 his inability to loose weight does not undermine his credibility.

Interestingly, plaintiff does not address the ALJ's statement that "[t]reatment
notes reflect that the claimant was not taking prescribed medication" and that "he was not doing
prescribed range of motion or strengthening exercises." This is a valid basis for rejecting
plaintiff's testimony.

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E. <u>Vocational Expert Testimony</u>

The ALJ may meet his burden under step five of the sequential analysis by
propounding to a vocational expert hypothetical questions based on medical assumptions,
supported by substantial evidence, that reflect all the plaintiff's limitations. <u>See Roberts v.</u>
<u>Shalala</u>, 66 F.3d 179, 184 (9th Cir. 1995). Specifically, where the Medical-Vocational
Guidelines are inapplicable because the plaintiff has sufficient non-exertional limitations, the
ALJ is required to obtain vocational expert testimony. <u>See Burkhart v. Bowen</u>, 587 F.2d 1335,
1341 (9th Cir. 1988).

9 Hypothetical questions posed to a vocational expert must set out all the 10 substantial, supported limitations and restrictions of the particular claimant. See Magallanes v. 11 Bowen, 881 F.2d 747, 756 (9th Cir. 1989). If a hypothetical does not reflect all the claimant's 12 limitations, the expert's testimony as to jobs in the national economy the claimant can perform 13 has no evidentiary value. See DeLorme v. Sullivan, 924 F.2d 841, 850 (9th Cir. 1991). While the ALJ may pose to the expert a range of hypothetical questions based on alternate 14 15 interpretations of the evidence, the hypothetical that ultimately serves as the basis for the ALJ's 16 determination must be supported by substantial evidence in the record as a whole. See Embrey v. 17 Bowen, 849 F.2d 418, 422-23 (9th Cir. 1988).

Plaintiff's argument that the ALJ erred with respect to hypothetical questions
posed to the vocational expert is derivative of the credibility argument discussed above. Plaintiff
concludes that, had the ALJ properly assessed his credibility, the statements of debilitating pain
would have been accepted and such limitations should have been part of the hypothetical
questions posed to the vocational expert. The court, however, finds no error with respect to the
ALJ's credibility analysis.

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1	V. CONCLUSION
2	Based on the foregoing, the court concludes that the Commissioner's final
3	decision is based on substantial evidence and proper legal analysis. Accordingly, IT IS HEREBY
4	ORDERED that:
5	1. Plaintiff's motion for summary judgment (Doc. 24) is denied;
6	2. Defendant's cross-motion for summary judgment (Doc. 28) is granted; and
7	3. The Clerk of the Court is directed to enter judgment and close this file.
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9	DATED: March 30, 2012
10	Loig m. Kellison
11	CRAIG M. KELLISON UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE
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