

Tips, Strategies and News You Can Use To Achieve Optimum Health...For Life!

Nov 2006 Issue

Why A Nerve Disorder Called Sciatica Affects 80 % Of Us - And What You Can Do About It

Brian is a healthy 35-year old male who exercises regularly and eats right. He avoids saturated fat, gets his blood pressure checked regularly and is fairly active. Lately, however, he has been experiencing a strange pain extending from his lower back all the way down his leg.

“Uh-oh”, he thinks to himself. “What is happening to me?”

This pain has been getting worse for the last few weeks and now something *must* be done.

Frightened, Brian calls his doctor and goes in for a check-up. His doctor performs a routine examination and then turns to Brian, “You have what is called ‘Sciatica’. Have you ever heard of that?”

Brian shakes his head.

“Well”, his doctor explains, “It’s a irritation of the **sciatic nerve** that runs through your lower trunk region all the way down your leg.

It’s not too serious at this point, but it *can* get worse if left untreated. I’m going to recommend you see a physical therapist to get it under control. Sciatica is something that responds **very** favorably to physical therapy. Let’s make a follow-up appointment in about 8 weeks or so”.

What Is Sciatica Anyway?

Later at home, Brian does his homework on Sciatica. Here is what he found:

First of all, sciatica is a **nerve disorder** that creates lower back and/or leg pain. This is a result of the sciatic nerve being pinched or irritated. This nerve (the sciatic nerve) branches out of the spinal cord and eventually fuses into one thick nerve about the **diameter of your index finger**. This nerve then travels down through your buttocks, down the back of your thighs and finally separates into different nerves once past the knee. As you



Robert Inglis, MPT, CSCS

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can imagine, the sciatic nerve is *very large*. That's one of the reasons sciatica is so common.

With sciatica, the sciatic nerve is normally pinched in the **lower back** or **lumbar region**, but the compression can be anywhere. Ultimately, though, it's the **pressure** on this nerve root that actually results in sciatica.



How Does The Sciatic Nerve Get Pinched?

Not usually sparked by a traumatic event or injury, sciatica more often develops as a result of **general wear and tear of the structures of the lower spine**. Sciatica can be the result of herniated discs, irritation or inflammation associated with arthritis, bulged discs or the narrowing of the spinal canal itself. In some cases I've also seen sciatica caused by a tight **piriformis muscle**. This is a muscle *underneath* your gluteus maximus muscle. If this muscle is tight, it *can* compress

the sciatic nerve. This is because the sciatic nerve runs either *through* this muscle, *underneath* this muscle or on *top* of this muscle.

Bottom line, any condition that causes irritation or a pinching of the sciatic nerve **can cause sciatica**.

How Long Does It Take To Heal?

The majority of people who experienced sciatica get better with time. Normally, it only takes a few weeks or months to recover. Sciatica affects men and women equally and normally strikes people from 30 to 50 years old. However, the good news (as Brian's doctor confirmed) is that sciatica **responds very well to non-surgical treatments**.

Symptoms Of Sciatica

One of the reasons I focused on sciatica this month is because I want to **take the confusion out of some of the symptoms you might be experiencing** with this condition. Because I know the symptoms *can* be scary.

For instance, some people think they might have scoliosis, others think they're "dying", or that they have any other number of very dangerous conditions.

Also, the symptoms will differ depending on the *location* of the pinched nerve. For example, *your* pain may be centered in your lower back but someone else might have pain trailing down the leg. In other cases, people will experience the pain **all the way down to the feet**. So symptoms of sciatica can vary greatly from person to person.

Some may experience debilitating symptoms, others just a slight tingling sensation down their legs.

Other Common Symptoms

- Pain in the buttocks that gets worse when you sit.
 - Burning or tingling down the leg.
 - Low back pain (which may also be present with leg pain).
- However, the back pain is usually less severe than the leg pain.
- Weakness, numbness or difficulty moving the leg and /or foot.
 - Constant pain on one side of the buttocks.
 - A "shooting pain" that makes it difficult to stand up.

With sciatica, normally the leg is involved. Sometimes the pain is described as a "tingling", "burning" or "prickly" sensation. However, if left untreated sciatica will grow worse and become a **chronic problem**.

This is very important for you understand. In fact, the longer you delay treatment with *any* condition, the longer it will take for treatment to heal that condition. As the old saying goes, "If it's caught early...". So, yes, sciatica **can** lead to permanent damage, which is why it is so important to get it looked at.

And when the symptoms do finally disappear, that pinched nerve can **still take another six months to fully heal**. Some sufferers also have occasional flareups. These should be checked by a doctor to ensure they don't progress into full-scale sciatica again.

How Long Do The

Symptoms Last?

How long the sciatica remains a problem for you depends on how long it takes for you to "rebuild" the support structures in your back. You see, you have to **rebuild your core muscles** to support your back.

Of course, you if you have this type of pain in the first place, you should call your doctor first and then follow up with your physical therapist. This is especially true if the pain lasts more than two or three days.

Your physical therapist will most likely put you on a **structured pain management program using physical therapy and exercise**.

Sometimes surgery is needed, but that depends on how severe, frequent and debilitating the pain is.

The bottom line with everything is that, left unchecked, the symptoms can get worse over time and become a chronic problem.

And nobody wants that. The symptoms of chronic sciatica are NOT pleasant. They include the inability to control your bowel or bladder, an ever-increasing weakness in your legs or loss of sensation in your legs and/or feet. So get it checked.

How Do You Treat Or Prevent Sciatica From Striking You?

The best way is to bounce back from sciatica is by building your body's core. A strong and supportive core **relieves pressure** on the sciatic nerve, which is the main reason sciatica strikes.

Your "core" is defined as the group of muscles, tendons and supportive structures that extend from

your lower chest all the way down to the middle of your thighs. This means your abdominal muscles, your obliques, your quadriceps, the muscles of the lower back and your gluteus maximus (among others) are all part of your **core**.

Only YOU Can Build Your Core

The ultimate responsibility to build your body's core rests with YOU. This is something nobody else can do for you and it's **not** something that comes out of a bottle in the form of a "magic pill".

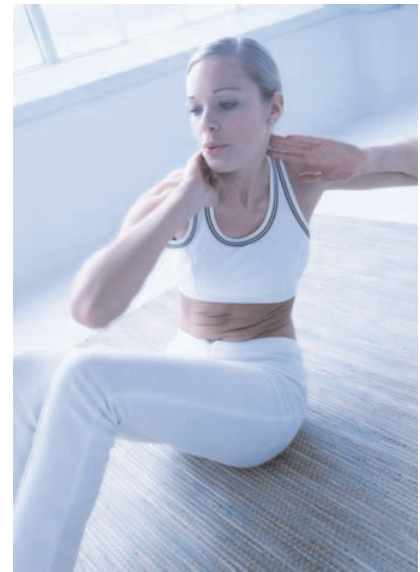
The sooner you realize that, the closer you are to a healthy and supportive core.

However, we *can help*. In our clinic, for instance, I have developed a unique **Four Phase Program** that helps alleviate the pain of sciatica and at the same time builds a strong core. Here are the steps a patient with sciatica typically goes through:

First, we work on **flexibility and range of motion**. This is the most basic step for any exercise program and also one of the most important. In this phase, I also teach you exactly your core muscles *are*. Learning what your core muscles are allows you to more effectively target those core muscles in the next phases.

Next, we move into what I call the **Static Phase**. This uses exercises with **no movement at all**. You are either sitting, standing, lying on your back or on your stomach. In this phase - the Static Phase - you learn how to contract those core muscles and increase your **neuromuscular knowledge and awareness**. You discover how to get these muscles *into* the exercise.

Next, in Phase Three, we move



into what we call the **Dynamic Stage**. Here, you recruit your core muscle groups and start to incorporate **upper extremity movements** and **lower extremity movements**. We give you about *five basic positions* where you move your arms and legs through different patterns. But with each exercise, you still maintain that core stability. And to further build your core, we introduce resistance (or weights), sometimes in the form of resistant tubing.

Finally, we're ready for Phase Four - the **Functional Stability Phase**. This phase includes exercises that are part of your **daily activities** and **everyday movements**. So here, we add more rotation, more complex moves, and more advanced exercises. Once this last phase is complete, *you are ready for life again!* You will have a strong, supportive core and this, in turn, will dramatically reduce your chances of developing sciatica.

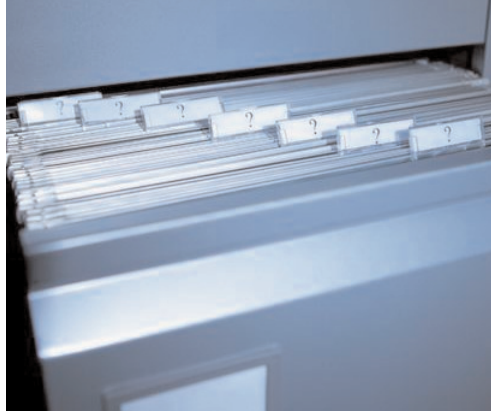
If you have any questions about sciatica, please (as always) email me at: mycorept@yahoo.com or call me (714) 528-9400. I'm here to help and I love hearing from YOU!

-- Robert Inglis, MPT, CSCS

Ask-An-Expert:

Your Questions And Answers

This month, I'm going to focus my questions and answers section on the main article topic of the month, sciatica. There is a **lot** of misinformation and confusion surrounding this disorder. So let's clear up some of the myths regarding sciatica...



Answer: While surgery may be required in some cases, the vast majority of sciatica incidents are corrected **without** surgery. In this month's main article, I noted that sciatica is **very responsive to physical therapy and more conservative treatment options**. While your friend may have had a particularly

bad case of sciatica (very frequent pain, disabling pain and/or pain that lasts a long time), it is NOT true that "all cases" of sciatica eventually end up in surgery. The general rule with any disorder is that **surgery should always be a last resort**. So if you do have sciatica, seek conservative treatment options first.

Question: "I've heard that sciatica is a genetic disorder and can be inherited from a parent. Is this true?"
Jim C., Fullerton

Answer: No. Sciatica is NOT inherited. As you discovered in the main article, sciatica is caused by the **pinching** of the **sciatic nerve**. This pinching and compression can have any number of causes, but most frequently is the result of **general wear and tear of the structures of the lower spine**. Other causes include herniated or bulged discs, the irritation and inflammation associated with arthritis, or even the narrowing of the spinal canal itself. Bottom line, sciatica is not a genetic disorder and just because your parents may have had an unusually bad case of sciatica, doesn't mean you will.

Question: "My brother-in-law has sciatica and he said bed rest is the best way for this to heal. He also said that exercise makes sciatica worse. Is there any truth to this?"
Judy W, Brea

Answer: Absolutely not. In fact, the complete **opposite** is true. If you're not exercising, you're not building your core. And if you remember, a weak core is often at the **root cause** of sciatica. So one of the most effective ways of reversing the pain associated with sciatica is by exercising and building a strong and supportive core.

Question: "A friend of mine recently underwent surgery for sciatica. She said that surgery is the only way to fully correct this problem. Is this true? If I suffer from sciatica, can I expect to have surgery at some point in the future?"
Wendy R., Placentia

Thanks to everybody for their questions! Please send your questions to me at mycorept@yahoo.com! I always enjoy reading them and if your question appears in this newsletter, I'll send you a gift certificate worth \$25! Keep the questions coming! -- Robert Inglis

Acidity vs. Alkalinity

The Inside Secrets Of pH Balance In Your Body

(Part Two) - *Mark Talle L.Ac.*

This is the second part of my article on pH for the body, Acidity vs. Alkalinity. This month, I'm going to focus on how to keep your personal pH in check and reveal some specific things you can do.

Recommendations

First, I'd suggest you eat a diet of **50 percent** raw foods. Raw foods not only maintain the correct acid/alkaline balance within the body, but they are also **richer in nutrients** that are easily assimilated into the body. Recommended foods include the following:

- Apples
- Avocados
- Bananas
- Bilberries
- Blackberries
- Grapefruit
- Grapes

- Lemons
- Pears
- Pineapples
- Strawberries
- And all vegetables.

Fresh fruits, especially citrus fruits and vegetables also reduce acidosis. Start with small amounts of citrus fruits and gradually add larger amounts.

I also recommend that you chew your food **slowly**, and not overindulge. Also, make sure food is mixed well with saliva to form a liquid consistency before swallowing. Do not drink fluids during meals.

Prepare cooked foods with care. Maintain clean working surfaces and wash all vegetables and fruit thoroughly. Keep



meat and vegetables separate because you can easily contaminate vegetables with bacteria from raw meat. Do not overcook vegetables.

Drink potato broth every day.

Avoid animal protein (especially beef and pork), as they lead to acidity.

Avoid beans, cereals, crackers, eggs, flour products, grains, oily foods, macaroni, and sugar. Plums, prunes, and cranberries do not oxidize and therefore remain acid to the body. Avoid these until the situation improves.

Since excess vitamin C may lead to acidosis,

reduce your intake of vitamin C for a few weeks. When taking vitamin C, use a non-acid-forming (buffered) variety. Practice deep breathing. Check your pH daily using pH paper.

CONSIDERATION

Phosphorus and sulfur act as buffers to maintain pH. Sulfur can be taken in supplement form

ACID-FORMING FOODS

Alcohol, Asparagus, Beans, Brussels sprouts, Buckwheat, Chickpeas, Cocoa, Coffee, Cornstarch, Cranberries, Eggs, Flour, Flour-based products, Legumes, Lentils, Meat, Milk, Mustard, Noodles, Oatmeal, Olives, Organ meats, Pasta, Pepper, Plums, Poultry, Prunes, Shellfish, Soft drinks, Sugar, All food with sugar

added, Tea, Vinegar, Aspirin, Tobacco, and most drugs are also acid forming.

LOW-LEVEL ACID-FORMING FOODS

Butter, Canned or glazed fruit, Cheese, Dried coconut, Dried or sulfured fruit (most), Grains (most), Ice cream, Ice milk, Nuts and seed (most), Parsley.

-- Mark Talle L.Ac.

How to Cope when Your Arthritis Flares Up

Most days, arthritis seems fairly manageable but every now and then, especially when the weather changes, pain and inflammation can spike. This is known as a “flare-up”. Here are some tips to help you get it under control:

Start cold. Applying a cold pack at the start of a flare-up can numb soreness and reduce swelling.

Then heat up. After the first 24 hours of a flare up, switch to heat. A heating pad, warm water soak or heat-generating cream helps bring blood into sore areas, relaxing tight muscles.

Try massage. Massage can help ease pain and muscle tension.

Walk. Its probably the last thing you feel like doing, but walking (even at a slower-than-normal pace) gets your **blood circulating**, bringing oxygen and nutrients that can speed healing to your tissues.

Stretch. If you have been to a physical therapist before, hopefully you have remembered to **keep up on your home exercises especially stretching**. If you need assistance or a copy of your exercise program, call your physical therapist.

Hit the bottle. Over the counter anti-inflammatory drugs, such as aspirin, ibuprofen(advil, motrin) or naproxen(alleve), or an analgesic like acetaminophen (tylenol) can reduce pain. Check with your doctor first.

Talk to your doctor. If your pain continues for more than a few days or if it's severe, bring your doctor on board. He/she may give you a prescription strength anti-inflammatory, such as diclofenac (Voltaren), or may prescribe a short-term course of a corticosteroid, such as prednisone. Or, if you're already taking a corticosteroid, he/she may temporarily increase your dosage.

Try these tips to keep your pain under control!

From Our Healthy Kitchen:

Savory Lemon Chicken



This Asian dish is a recipe that's sure to please the **entire family**. It is easy to prepare, light on calories and best of all...delicious!

Ingredients

- 1 lb. of skinned, boneless chicken breasts, cut into strips
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tbs butter (don't worry: a little won't hurt).
- 1 tbs cornstarch
- 1 13-oz can of chicken broth
- 1 carrot, sliced diagonally
- 3 - 4 tbs of fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp of grated lemon rind
- 1 tsp of salt
- 1 cup snow pea pods
- 1 tbs dried parsley
- 1 cup minute rice

Directions

- 1.) Saute chicken, onion and garlic in butter until chicken is lightly browned.
- 2.) Stir in cornstarch and cook 1 minute.
- 3.) Add broth, carrots, lemon juice, lemon rind and salt.
- 4.) Bring to a full boil.
- 5.) Stir in peas, parsley and rice. Cover, remove from heat and let stand 5 minutes.
- 6.) Serve and enjoy!

If YOU have a family recipe you'd like to share - or any healthy recipes **you'd** like to pass along - please email them to: mycorept@yahoo.com. I may just print it in an upcoming newsletter!

Health Trivia - Test Your Health And Fitness Knowledge!

QUESTION #1:

How many years - on average - does obesity reduce your lifespan?

- ___ a.) 6 months
- ___ b.) 12 months
- ___ c.) 16 months
- ___ d.) 36 months

QUESTION #2:

Which fat is the worst for your health?

- ___ a.) Monounsaturated fat
- ___ b.) Polyunsaturated fat
- ___ c.) Saturated fat
- ___ d.) Transfat

QUESTION #3:

What was the average lifespan of an Egyptian 3000 years ago?

- ___ a.) 83 years

- ___ b.) 57 years
- ___ c.) 48 years
- ___ d.) 30 years

QUESTION #4:

What are a woman's risk of getting breast cancer if she lives to the age of 65?

- ___ a.) 1 in 17
- ___ b.) 1 in 79
- ___ c.) 1 in 112
- ___ d.) 1 in 759

QUESTION #5:

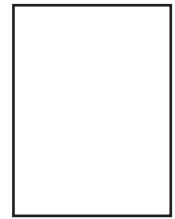
Which food contains the most Vitamin C?

- ___ a.) Strawberries
- ___ b.) Sprouts
- ___ c.) Oranges
- ___ d.) Milk

Answers:

1) d 2) d 3) d 4) a 5) b

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Tis The Season For Physical Therapy!

If you're experiencing aches or pains...don't fret! Because NOW is the time to come in and **take advantage of physical therapy treatment!** Most likely, your insurance deductibles have been met for the year...which means **you** don't pay as much out-of-pocket! That makes this the very best time of the

year to get some good physical therapy. Get a jump on your aches and pains! Call **(714) 528-9400 NOW** to **re-activate your physical therapy** and get back on track!

(And don't forget: You don't have to wait until your New Year's Resolution to get in shape, either! Call NOW!)

