

Your Spinal Health Questions Answered

with Dr Debbie Saxton

Welcome back! Thank you all for your letters, I hope you have all been helped by the replies I have sent. The topics have been varied, but as expected there have been many questions relating to lower back pain. This is an enormous topic and one I will revisit again over the next few months however one letter stood out as a seasonally topical one...

"Dear Debbie

Last year I bent down to lift the turkey out of the oven on Christmas day and got an excruciating pain across my lower back. I was unable to straighten for many minutes. Sitting was impossible and I shuffled around bent forwards for days. The pain spread down the back of my right leg into my calf. Due to the holidays I was unable to see my GP and over the next few days the pain eased a little and almost disappeared over the next 2 weeks. My main concern is the fact I have had continued trouble over the year, nothing as bad, but definitely still there. Pain killers and anti-inflammatory drugs have not cured the problem. Did I do some permanent damage? What did I do to my back when I lifted the turkey?"
Mrs B, aged 48.

Dear Mrs B,

You almost certainly had an episode of sciatica last Christmas. Sciatica is most common in the age group 40-50 years and begins as acute low back pain that spreads down one or both legs. The pain will worsen with sitting or prolonged standing. The sciatic nerve is a large nerve that exits from the low back and travels down the leg. Pressure on the nerve can come from an injured disc, a joint or even a muscle spasm. With the symptoms you have described I suspect you have had a disc injury. Whilst a disc cannot "slip" it can bulge, herniate or rupture. This results in swelling, pain and inflammation around the nerve root.

Sciatica can be caused by a trauma but most commonly it occurs as a result of cumulative damage caused by bad posture, poor muscle tone, excess weight and other lifestyle stresses. Then something small triggers an episode of acute irritation.

Although in the early stages pain relief can often be necessary it will not cure the problem. Physical therapy will exercise the joints but will not restore normal function to the disc. Extension exercises

are aggravating and should be avoided. Surgery is the last course of action and saved only for the most severe disc protrusions. Ice applied to the low back in 20 minute stints will take inflammation down and ease pain without the use of drugs.



Fortunately sciatica responds very well to chiropractic care. If the mechanics of an area are not restored to normal function problems will niggle away and at some point in time another episode will occur. Correcting all the causal factors of the attack will give a much better result. No more niggles and pain free living again.

Wishing you the best of spinal health for Christmas and the New Year, and remember...

"Don't ignore the niggles!"

Debbie Saxton

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