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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Do You Have Pain in the Butt?

Although chiropractors are well known for their successful treatment of neck pain, headaches, and back pain, there are a many other problems that they successfully treat. A common one is a chronic dull ache in the buttock region. The pain is usually only on one side and feels like it is originating from deep within the muscles and soft tissues. The more a person sits, the worse it gets, and walking seems to help alleviate it temporary. When left untreated, the pain and/or numbness can travel downward to the hip, thigh, and even the foot.

The clinical term for this problem is called "piriformis syndrome". A small muscle (called the "piriformis") is located underneath the large buttock muscles. When you sit on a hard surface, on your wallet that is in your back pocket, or sit on an uncomfortable chair for a prolonged period of time, the pressure seems to aggravate and make the muscle very tight. Doing activities that require repetitive outward rotation of the hip and leg can also provoke the muscle to go into spasm. Unfortunately, the largest nerve in your body, called the "sciatic nerve", is located directly underneath the piriformis muscle. When this muscle goes into spasm, the sciatic nerve can become irritated or pinched. This nerve originates in the low back, passes under the piriformis muscle as discussed and travels down the back and side of your leg until it ends at the bottom of your foot. It is responsible for controlling the sensation of pain, touch of the skin, and most of the muscles of your leg.

If the pressure on the nerve is severe enough, pain and numbness will be felt in the same pattern as where the nerve travels. There are other possibly more severe causes of the same type of symptoms so be sure to see your chiropractor so an accurate diagnosis can be made.

Once it is determined that the problem is actually piriformis syndrome, the first step is to alleviate the spasm of the piriformis muscle. This can be done by using deep pressure or massage of the muscle itself. To do this correctly, you must have a good knowledge of the anatomy of the region. In my office, I also use a mild electrical therapy modality called "Interferential Current" to assist further in loosening the tight muscles. I have included a stretching exercise that I generally have my patients do to speed up their recovery and help prevent it from reoccurring (see diagram).

Of equal importance is how well the hip, low back, and pelvic joints are functioning. If there is a restricted range of motion or mobility of any of these joints, the muscles will have to compensate by working harder as you do your daily activities. This causes chronic muscle spasm and fatigue of the hip and low back muscles, eventually leading to the problem we are discussing. The most successful and safest method to restore the movement of these joints is through chiropractic manipulation.

By relieving the muscle spasm and restoring the motion to the joints, you are treating the cause of the problem and not just eliminating the symptoms (pain). Also, if there are activities that you are doing at home or at work that you think may be aggravating the hip or buttock, ask your chiropractor how these things can be changed so they have less of a negative effect.

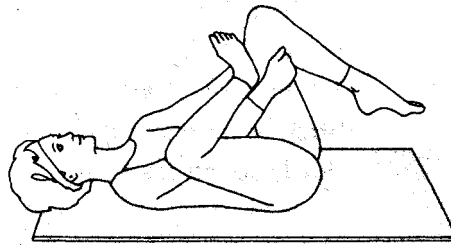


Figure 1 – Place the right ankle on the left knee and pull both legs up toward the chest. Relax your neck and shoulders. You should feel a comfortable stretch in the right buttock. Hold for ten seconds. Repeat on each side four times.