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

Pain In The Butt?

Practically on a weekly basis, I have someone come to see me for an ongoing pain deep in one side of their buttocks. Often, his or her symptoms, pain/tingling/numbness starting in one or both buttocks and extending down as far as the feet, started for no particular reason. Their pain etc. usually feels better when walking but gets worse with inactivity or rest. Of course, they are desperate for relief because no other treatment has helped. Chiropractors are trained to identify and treat this condition, called "piriformis syndrome".

No one really knows exactly what causes piriformis syndrome in some people. However, I believe it is usually due to not enough, and in a few instances, too much exercise. Some physicians believe that piriformis syndrome is the name given to hip/buttock pain that cannot be otherwise diagnosed. However, after ten years of practice, I know that piriformis syndrome is a very real cause of pain and disability.

The piriformis is a very deep muscle that travels from behind the hip joint, through the buttock, and attaches to the back of the pelvis. This muscle is small compared to its neighbouring ones around the hip and thigh, and it aids in external rotation (turning out) of the hip joint. The piriformis muscle and its tendon are adjacent to the sciatic nerve--the largest nerve in the body--which supplies the lower extremities with motor and sensory function.

It is thought that a tight or spastic piriformis muscle may be able to directly compress or irritate the sciatic nerve, causing pain and other symptoms wherever the sciatic nerve travels. While it has not been proven, another theory is that when the piriformis muscle and its tendon are too tight, the sciatic nerve is choked. This may decrease the blood flow to the nerve and irritate the nerve because of pressure.

In regards to treatment, if the mobility of the adjacent joints and flexibility of the piriformis muscle is restored, the irritation on the sciatic nerve will subside. Although this sounds easy, specific forms of treatment and stretching have to be used to release the muscle spasm. Taking medication for the symptoms will not solve the "cause" of the problem. If you think you may have piriformis syndrome, have your back and hips examined by a chiropractor so an accurate diagnosis can be made.