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

Dug Yourself into a Hole?

Have you ever heard of the phrase “you have dug yourself into a hole” used to describe a situation where you have let yourself get into a bad predicament? I use this phrase as an analogy to help my patients understand why they are suddenly experiencing debilitating pain in one or more regions of their spine in the absence of any recent falls or trauma.

This is how the analogy goes. Your lower back is experiencing excruciating pain since you attempted to do some activity that should not normally be a problem. You are frustrated because you did not do anything traumatic or lift anything too heavy that would cause you to deserve such pain. It all just happened so fast! Now, you are unable to go to work or any other activity for that matter. How did you get into this predicament? Well, picture yourself standing at the bottom of a three-meter hole. Unknowingly, you have actually been digging yourself into this hole for some time. Imagine this three-meter hole being broken down into thirds. When you began getting *muscle tension* along one or more areas of your spine, you had already dug yourself into a hole one meter deep. Unfortunately, you may not of been consciously aware of what you were doing since muscle tension alone can be relatively *painless*.

Most of the muscles in your back or neck all attach to the bones or vertebrae of your spine. So, the tighter the muscles became, the more the movement of the joints between the vertebrae was reduced. For any joint in your body to remain healthy, it must be able to move completely and freely. Eventually, the *joints of your spine became stiff and relatively immobile*, making them vulnerable to injury. It was at this point that you had dug yourself down another meter to the middle third of the hole. It is also important to note that losing a percentage of the mobility in the joints of your spine can also be relatively *painless*.

At this point, you are two meters into a three meter hole and completely unaware of it. The only warning signs you may have noticed was a little stiffness of your neck or back in the morning which disappeared after a few minutes of moving around. You have lost a portion of your muscle flexibility and joint mobility due to a lack of exercise, emotional or physical stress, obesity, or previous injuries. However, this did not concern you significantly because it did not generally interfere with your work or lifestyle. Then, you did something as simple as bending over to pick up your shoe or brush your teeth. This

mildly challenged the joints and muscles in and along your spine. But, because you had lost some of your joint mobility and muscle flexibility, you suddenly aggravate one or more of your already vulnerable muscles and/or joints. At this point, the *nerves in and around your spine became irritated or "pinched"*. It was only then that you consciously became aware that you were *actually in pain*! You have now dug yourself down the full three meters or to the bottom third of the hole.

If after reading this you discover that this sounds a lot like you, don't despair. There is a solution, but it may not be as simple as you think. A pill may help kill the pain but it will not restore the flexibility to your muscles or the mobility to your joints. Bed rest may make the muscle flexibility and joint mobility even worse. You have to become proactive. Patients in our office undergo a series of chiropractic adjustments or manipulation in order to restore the mobility in the joints in their spine. They are then shown a series of stretches and exercises to do at home to improve their muscle flexibility and help maintain their restored joint mobility. However, the longer you have been stiff and inflexible, the longer it will take for you to restore your joints and muscles to a healthy level. Once you have managed to climb out of your hole, do not quit doing what you have to do to prevent yourself from falling back in. Many of our patients return each month so that any restrictions in the mobility of their joints can be identified and corrected by a chiropractic adjustment. As well, each patient should continue doing their stretches and exercises to prevent their muscles from losing flexibility. By sticking to a preventative program such as this, our patients are much more prepared to handle the everyday emotional or physical stress that life throws at them.