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**Get back into shape . . .
the chiropractic way**

Back Talk

WITH MARTIN PRESS



While we cleared up some of the common misconceptions surrounding the back and lower back pain last issue, we didn't have space to deal to them all. So using the true or false approach once again let's start with a question. *Sciatica is pain which radiates into different parts of the body like the leg or arm. True or False?*

To all of you out there who answered True – well you are wrong. The pain is but a symptom. True sciatica occurs when the sciatic nerve is pinched or irritated and pain travels along the sciatic nerve as a result. Often a particular event or injury does not always cause sciatica, but rather it may develop as a result of general wear and tear on the structures of the lower spine and pelvis.

Sciatica can be a real pain in the ...um butt. True or False? True. Some people can experience a constant pain on one side of the rear. Sciatica usually only affects one side of the lower back, and the pain often radiates from the lower back down the back of the leg and depending on how the sciatic nerve is affected, the pain may also radiate to the foot.

People complaining of leg pain often do not, in fact, have leg pain. True or False? True. These people suffer from referred pain i.e. where pain is felt at a place in the body e.g. the leg, different from the injured part where the pain would be expected (the low back). This is real pain, similar to phantom pain in amputees except you still have the leg.

Other areas where referred pain can be experienced include knee, ankle and hip and this happens because the body is forced to adapt or compensate for the injury. For instance a person with a sore back on one side is likely to lean away from the pain. The first rule of compensation being *the eyes always seek the horizontal*. This causes people to have lateral leans and this condition of side-to-side spinal curves is called a scoliosis. On an X-ray, the spine of someone with scoliosis looks more like an "S" or a "C" than a straight line.

Putting stress on other parts of the body causes conditions like sore necks,

shoulders, hips and so on. A lot of the time people think their hip or knee pain has been caused by their back problem believing they have been compensating for it. Quite often the reverse can be true.

It is common for people to have one hip replaced and then later also need their other hip replaced. True or False? True, it is the compensation rule in action – people lean too long and heavily on their "good" hip causing it increased wear and tear.

Basically if compensations are left long enough it can quite often become permanent due to the muscle changes – wasting and strengthening – and eventually osteoarthritic changes will develop in the stressed areas of the spine and joints.

So it does not matter how small the injury people should seek advice with respect to restoring normal function and body balance to reduce the likelihood of ongoing complications. People need help to correctly identify the source of pain to know the proper treatment.

Once you start going to a chiropractor you have to keep going. True or False? Unfortunately this statement is false – be great for business if it were true! What happens is a lot of people go through life feeling discomfort at a level of say six out of 10 and are quite happy to live with it. Then they injure themselves and the pain increases to nine out of 10 causing them to finally seek chiropractic help. After treatment the pain level may reduce to one to three out of 10 and these people enjoy what for them is their optimum level of comfort or spinal health. When the inevitable wear and tear and time causes the pain level to slip back to say five out of 10, better than they used to experience, they find they no longer want to live with this level of discomfort. So these people seek maintenance care.

If you have a fairly sedentary life style and look after yourself well then you may not wish or need to have maintenance care. However for those who wish to keep themselves at a level of optimum spinal health then my professional advice is try maintenance care as maintenance care is wonderful but it is up to the individual. ■