

The Benefits of Acupuncture on Lumbar Radiculopathy (Sciatica)

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A sharp sometimes burning pain, originating around your buttocks, shoots down your leg. The pain did stop around your knee but now it has extended its unbearable path down your ankle. Or maybe the pain is less severe with tingling or a “pins-and needles” sensation in the leg or thigh. Maybe you just have recurrent thigh cramping or experience pain while running or seated. Regardless to the description of the discomfort, or when it occurs, your quality of life is not the same. Golf, basketball, chores or simple exercise aren’t inviting options when walking or sitting is torturous. Further, if you are between 30-50 years of age you are more likely to experience this problem.

The cause of your pain could be simple wear and tear, or prolonged sitting or lying on the buttocks. Compression of the sciatic nerve by the piriformis muscle, or pressure on a lumbar disk that may press directly on sciatic nerve roots could be the cause of discomfort. Sciatic pain of the latter type is generally associated with accompanying back pain, while the former generally starts around the buttocks. Systemic diseases like Diabetes, which can lead to neuropathy (nerve damage), pressure from tumors, abscess, fracture, and bony irregularities (ex. osteoarthritis) can cause the pain associated with Sciatica (lumbar radiculopathy). In some cases the cause may be idiopathic, meaning of unknown origin. If you experience bladder or bowel dysfunction (i.e. urine retention, incontinence) decreased sensation around the genitals, or progressive leg weakness, seek **immediate** medical care as the previous may indicate cauda equine syndrome which is a medical emergency.

The good news is that Sciatica is not a medical emergency and the vast majority will generally heal itself, if given time and rest. However, the previous indicates nothing about what you should do to treat the pain in the interim or options if pain does not subside. And approximately 25 percent of sciatica sufferers have symptoms that last 6 weeks or longer. Conventional medicine uses anti-inflammatory medications or muscle relaxants. Some individuals experience pain so severe, they may request prescription medication, or steroid injections to deliver anti-inflammatory relief directly to the site. However, the efficacy of steroid injections generally decreases over time. If the pain has not subsided after 3 months or more, you may consider surgery to open the space around the area causing compression of the nerve (laminectomy, or discectomy).

But what if you want pain relief without side effects? What if you want to give your liver a “time out” or you are already on medication and are opposed to adding an additional prescription? If your pain has been diagnosed as idiopathic, or before you

undergo surgery (providing your x-ray does not indicate structural damage like a ruptured disc) why not try acupuncture and Chinese medicine? Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) differentiation allows for the diagnosis of your pain utilizing a different theory and treatment application. You will be asked many of the same questions asked by your medical doctor. Other detailed questions about your health specific to Chinese medicine will also be asked. Although the Chinese medicine questions may seem irrelevant to your condition, these questions give the practitioner valuable information that is used to construct a holistic treatment protocol specific to your needs.

Based on the TCM rational, there are approximately four reasons for sciatica. All four reasons are based on some type of energy flow issue. Determining which type of energy flow problems depends on the type of information given about the specific symptoms. The information is then used to construct a TCM differentiation and treatment protocol. The treatment will usually consist of acupuncture or electro-acupuncture and may include an herbal formula. There is no need to fear the needles in acupuncture. The needles are hair thin. In acupuncture the needles are not serrated and hollow like the types used for IV's, blood withdrawal, or injections. Acupuncture used for pain is statistically sound and the World Health Organization (WHO) cites sciatica as being one of many conditions which benefit from acupuncture.

With regard to herbal formulation, one pill fits all is not the standard in the application of TCM and is one of the elements that sets it apart from other treatment styles. The intake portion of your visit will allow the practitioner to determine the best herbal formula for your specific situation.

If you are in the process of debating what to do about your sciatica, whether acute or recurrent, give acupuncture and herbal medicine an opportunity. Just schedule an appointment at Qi Acupuncture and Wellness, tell us how your pain started, where it travels and exactly what you feel. Then allow Qi to assist your body's innate ability to heal itself. Below is a former sciatica patient statement:

"I had been to my regular doctor and was given a prescription drug which helped only minimally. Surgery was being discussed as an option for my problem. After taking a week off work because of sciatic pain, my fiancée suggested I try acupuncture which was something I had never considered. When Renee arrived at my house I could barely walk. [A]fter my acupuncture treatment I felt like playing basketball! Everyone in the house noticed a distinct difference in my walking. I felt no pain and the results lasted a long time. I wish she had never relocated to another state!"

~TL Male 30 Judson, Tx

If you live in Phoenix or the West Valley and you have sciatica, call Qi Acupuncture and Wellness at 602-462-1115 to Stop Your Pain Today!

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