

Innovative Physical, Occupational, & Massage Therapies for Pain Relief and Injury Rehabilitation



JUNE - JULY 2007

The Role of Physical and Massage Therapies in the Treatment of Sciatica - ¹As a symptom of another problem involving the nerve such as a herniated disk; depending on the cause, the pain of acute sciatica usually goes away on it's own in six weeks or so. ^{2,3,4}Specific physician based treatment recommendations include NSAIDs, oral steroids, epidural steroid injections, heat and cold applications, physical therapy, and surgery. There are also a vast number of mechanical and electrical devices, the use of which will not be addressed in this issue. With regard to physical therapy, ⁵exercise generally is not helpful for acute back pain. Overexertion may be as unhelpful as prolonged bed rest. An incremental program of modalities and exercise

can be introduced within two to three weeks if the pain has not improved, and at that time, ¹physical therapy can help ease the discomfort of sciatica and speed recovery. ⁵It is important that the program be guided by professionals who understand the limitations and special needs of back pain, and who can address individual health conditions. ⁶One randomized trial demonstrated that therapies based on standardized assessment produced statistically significant superior outcomes compared with general nonspecific exercise advice. While the role of physical therapy in treating sciatic problems is well documented, ¹massage therapy may also help relieve both acute and chronic low back pain, but there are fewer clinical studies on the use of massage therapy. One of the more recognized studies on massage therapy appeared in the ⁷*Canadian Medical Association Journal*, comparing results in patients with sub-acute back pain who received comprehensive massage therapy, soft-tissue manipulation only, remedial exercise with posture education, and sham laser therapy. At the end of treatment and at one month follow-up, the comprehensive massage therapy group had equal or significantly better scores (RDQ, PPI, PRI, SAI, Schober, ANOVA, and Scheffé) than did the other three groups. The researchers determined that clinical significance was demonstrated in the comprehensive massage therapy group, and also evident in the soft tissue manipulation group. This article has since been cited in *Archives of Internal Medicine*, *Annals of Family Medicine*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *Rheumatology*, and the *American Journal of Public Health*. Another study, ⁸compared massage with acupuncture (including electrical stimulation, cupping, herbs, and exercise) and self-care for treatment of low back pain. Massage produced the most favorable post treatment results at ten and forty weeks. The benefit for patients with sciatic related problems is that we can employ both physical therapy and therapeutic massage in our treatment programs; and at our practice, Medicare and most insurances will cover the cost of therapy when administered by a qualified therapist. If patients with back pain are not showing improvement from rest and medication after a couple weeks, then we encourage them to ask their physician for a referral to our practice.

Please consider asking your doctor for a referral to our practice if you are bothered by pain, suffer from an injury, or are planning a surgery. You can print a referral form (Rx form) from the home page of this website.

1. Mayo Clinic Foundation for Medical Education and Research: April 21, 2006

2. Cleveland Clinic Department of Patient Education and Health Information

3. NYU Medical Center, Patient care, NYU Hospital, New York, NY

4. Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, [www.med.nyu.edu/patient care/sciatica](http://www.med.nyu.edu/patient%20care/sciatica)

5. University of Maryland Medical Center, Patient Ed., ©UMMC 2007 University of Maryland School of Medicine, A.D.A.M.