

MONTHLY FOCUS

JULY 2020

THIS MONTH:

- Medical imaging in Low Back Pain
- Pelvic Floor Strength vs Length
- Sciatica
- Pilates or Yoga for Pelvic floor?

References:

Brinjikji et al (2016)

Systematic Literature review of Imaging Features of Spinal Degeneration in Asymptomatic Populations

In the eye of the beholder...

Medical imaging in low back pain is not as useful as you would anticipate. There is growing evidence that degenerative changes and structural deficits found on imaging (x-ray, MRI, CT scan) are common in people with NO pain and NO disability, and that it would be more sensible to assume that scans are therefore simply confirming evidence of ageing on the inside, just as the presence of wrinkles and grey hair shows ageing on the outside.

In a pivotal 2016 paper, degenerative changes via MRI scan were investigated in people with no symptoms at all. Have a look at the table included here. Even a third of people in their 20s displayed a disc bulge; often the assumed reason for common sciatic pain.

Imaging Finding	Age (yr)						
	20	30	40	50	60	70	80
Disk degeneration	37%	52%	68%	80%	88%	93%	96%
Disk signal loss	17%	33%	54%	73%	86%	94%	97%
Disk height loss	24%	34%	45%	56%	67%	76%	84%
Disk bulge	30%	40%	50%	60%	69%	77%	84%
Disk protrusion	29%	31%	33%	36%	38%	40%	43%
Annular fissure	19%	20%	22%	23%	25%	27%	29%
Facet degeneration	4%	9%	18%	32%	50%	69%	83%
Spondylolisthesis	3%	5%	8%	14%	23%	35%	50%

Scan results should therefore be interpreted with caution, and considered as part of the picture only. It's food for thought!

Pelvic Floor Strength vs Length

There needs to be a balance between strength and length, for optimal functioning of the pelvic floor, as they play a key role in bladder, bowel and sexual functioning. Most people think that if we leak urine or are a bit windy, especially after having had a baby, this is 'normal'. I'll say this once – this is *never* normal; though it is increasingly 'accepted' by the modern world, and your first port of call should be a Pelvic Health Physio-

therapist if this strikes a chord.

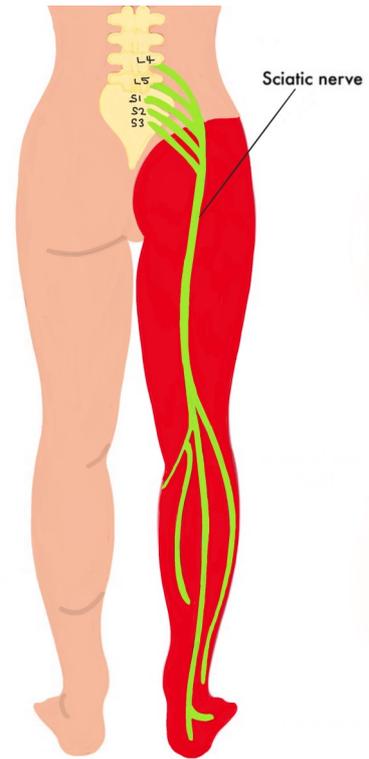
There are some instances where weakness of the pelvic floor contributes to issues which usually become more apparent (and problematic) after pregnancy and/or during menopause as a result of hormonal fluctuations. These can include back or pelvic pain, urine leakage, or needing to pee all the time, a sense of pressure or dragging in the pelvic region, or vaginal dryness. There are

also some instances where pelvic floor muscles are too tight- who knew?!

An ideal pelvic floor should have the appropriate strength (to support all of your internal organs), as well as the appropriate length (to ensure that you can relax and open your bowels for example). It's just as important to be able to *relax* your pelvic floor to ensure optimal working and length/tension relationship is maintained.



The Sciatic nerve is the largest in the human body, being the longest and widest, running from the lower spine all the way down to the foot in each leg. Pain which is caused by compression or irritation of the nerve is often referred to as 'sciatica', and described as a shooting pain or electric shock. There may also be a background dull ache usually described as toothache, and areas of numbness and/or tingling down the leg or in the foot.



DID YOU KNOW?

Pilates or Yoga?

As a general rule of thumb, if you are hypermobile, e.g. your elbows or knees bend a bit backwards, or you can really easily touch the floor, or you do the splits, you will need to *strengthen* your pelvic floor and core muscles to prevent problems such as pelvic pain, back pain and continence issues, and have the appropriate level of strength to get through everyday tasks, includ-

ing changes of position, lifting any types of load, and sports. Pilates is usually considered advantageous over yoga for this due to repetition of exercises building muscle mass, and therefore leading to muscle strength (and 'stiffness' of muscle activity) via this method.

which means some styles of yoga and pilates, focussing on breathing, and relaxation techniques or mindfulness could be useful for you.

Be careful though – for those of you that are dedicated yogis, you'll know that some yoga styles are focussed towards strengthening, whilst others are geared towards lengthening (for example endurance holds or restorative yoga), so you need to make sure the background style suits you and your needs. The added bonus of many styles of yoga including meditation and relaxation assists with 'softening' of tight muscle groups.



If you are quite muscly and toned, or are a highly strung or anxious person, you most likely will need to *lengthen* pelvic floor muscles, to ensure activities such as opening your bowels, or having sex are painless and less effortful,