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Natural Help for Sciatica

Pain shooting from the buttock down the leg – it can feel like an electrical shock, or like you’re being stabbed with a knife. There may also be lower back pain, as well as numbness, tingling, or weakness down the leg. Sciatica can take your breath away, and make everyday tasks excruciating. I encounter sciatic pain frequently in my Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Acupuncture practice, and I’m happy to say (and so are my clients!) that I’ve had good success treating it.

The sciatic nerve is the largest and longest nerve in the body, and is about as big around as your thumb. It is responsible for supplying sensation and strength to the leg. It originates in the lower back, where the nerve roots exit the spinal cord, then travels through the buttock, down to the toes. The sciatic nerve can become entrapped at any point along its path, causing pain both at the site, and along the path of the nerve. Because of the many branches of the nerve, and the many spots that it can be affected, the area of pain will vary from case to case. The most common sites of entrapment are the lower back, the sacroiliac joints, (where the pelvis meets the sacrum) and the buttock, where a tight piriformis muscle can put pressure on the nerve.

Acupuncture can release tight muscles and structures that are irritating the nerve, and address problems in the spine, such as vertebral issues. Fine sterile needles are placed in the area where the problem originates, as well as at specific points along the path of the nerve, and at supportive points throughout the body. In Chinese Medicine terms, Acupuncture unblocks the *Qi*, or bioenergy, that runs through the body. When *Qi* is blocked, there is pain. When the *Qi* is flowing smoothly, blood flow is also increased in the area, and the muscles can release. As well, healing of compromised tissues is enhanced and alignment is rebalanced. And, most importantly for my clients, the pain goes away!

Traditional Chinese Medicine is a holistic system that addresses the entire body and mind. We always treat the whole system, as well as working on the area the symptoms are manifesting. For this reason, each client is given a thorough diagnosis, including a series of questions regarding body and emotional functions, as well as a tongue and pulse diagnosis. This helps to determine any weaknesses or imbalances in the system. Acupuncture points will then be chosen not only at the site of pain, but also to address these imbalances. For example, deficiency in the Kidney organ system can lead to fatigue, as well as weakness in the lower back, which can contribute to sciatica. Chronic states such as fear, stress and overwork will tend to deplete Kidney energy and cause muscle tension, adding to the problem.

I just love how Chinese Medicine treats each client as an individual, seeking to balance their whole being, rather than just getting rid of the symptoms. In this way, healing is deep and long-lasting. Many clients report that in addition to pain reduction, they just feel better overall. “Almost more exciting than the decrease in my sciatic pain is how much better I feel in myself! I’m sleeping better, have more energy, and feel happier and more relaxed!”

Jane Marshall, D.TCM, D.Ac, has been practicing Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture for 16 years. Her office is located at 112 Front St, in downtown Wolfville. For more information call: (902)404-3374 or check out her website: janemarshallacupuncture.ca