

Orthopaedic Connection

If Walking Hurts, Don't Always Blame Arthritis

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

I have told you many times that walking is for most people the best way to exercise. Before motorized vehicles you didn't need to tell people to walk. You either walked, rode a horse or you didn't go anywhere. Doctors didn't need to tell people to get more exercise.

It has also been said in these articles that walking and other moderate exercise activities can help reduce pain, increase endurance and mobility and even slow arthritis progression.

I have noted that in my practice when something hurts 9 times out of 10 the patient says they must have arthritis. Sometimes the medical person agrees with them, writes a prescription and says "next".

Arthritis, even though it is our enemy, I have to admit, it has gotten a bad rap.

What Else?

It is up to me to make a correct diagnosis when pain makes walking difficult. I have to think of these things even though only one of them is an area I personally treat.

There are four common non arthritic conditions that cause lower extremity pain that can complicate diagnosis and complicate arthritis treatment and management.

Chronic Vein Trouble

Doctors call it venous insufficiency, a condition in which veins have a hard time sending blood from your legs back to your heart.

The valves in your veins keep the blood flowing and prevent pooling in the vein. The valves in swollen (varicose) veins are damaged or missing. The veins stay filled with blood especially when you stand. Venous insufficiency may be caused by a clot blocking a vein. This is called thrombosis.

Symptoms

- Aching feeling of heaviness in legs
- Swelling in feet and legs (edema)
- Skin color change, inflammation

Treatment is compression stockings if the person can wear them. They come in several varieties. Elevating the legs, as possible, is helpful. Surgery is an option in some cases.

Diabetic Neuropathy

I'm making this way too simple, but over time high blood sugar may damage the covering on nerves and blood vessels that brings oxygen to your nerves. Symptoms are numbness in hands, legs, feet and shooting pains. Burning and tingling occur. Blood sugar must be brought into normal range and certain antidepressants and anticonvulsants can control pain.

Peripheral Artery Disease

It is caused by hardening of the arteries. It leads to narrowing of the arteries in the legs and feet. Decreased blood flow can injure muscles, nerves and other tissues. The muscles may not get enough oxygen during exercise and eventually may not get enough oxygen during rest.

Treatment is to stop smoking, lower cholesterol and take blood thinners and pain medication. Surgery can be required in certain cases.

Spinal Stenosis

It certainly causes pain in both legs in a lot of patients I see. It is a constriction around the nerves in the lower spine which I diagnose by exam, plain x-rays and often MRI. Treatment consists of epidural injections and possibly surgery to decompress the nerves.

Proper treatment of any of these conditions is based on a correct diagnosis which is what I do. Even though I am an Orthopaedic Surgeon I have to be totally aware of other conditions as well that cause arthritis type symptoms.

Factoid

How I Learned to Love Roller Coasters

Giant Roller Coasters and Thrill Rides are not what most people dream about. I have had very few patients say they would want to take a ride with me on Millennium Force or Top Thrill Dragster at Cedar Point, the Roller Coaster Capital of the World. Most say never, no way to 120 miles an hour in 4 seconds going straight up to 420 feet, then straight down! While I have gone to Cedar Point since childhood I didn't always go on the giant coasters. They are scary, I admit. But some things you just have to do (to keep up with Alice, my wife!) When you overcome fear, take charge, make a big leap, it changes you. It takes you to a whole different place. Thanks, Al. As they say at The Park, "Ride on!" The physics of coasters is fascinating, but that may take a whole article.

Office Website and Gratiot County Herald Archive

Don't forget that the office website and Gratiot County Herald Archive never close! www.orthopodsurgeon.com and Your Orthopaedic Connection and the Archive of Articles in Gratiot County Herald (105 strong) exist for you. It truly is a treasure trove of great information at the click of a mouse.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush