

What does a multifidus have to do with my low back pain?



BY MARK M RYAN, MD

If you have never sought care for low back pain, you are among a fortunate few individuals over the age of fifty. For the vast majority of patients who have experienced low back pain, the evaluation can be less than satisfying. Imaging studies - whether X-ray, CT, or MRI - are interpreted by radiologists who use dense medical language that invokes uncertainty and, thus, fear in both patients and providers uncertain of what is precisely causing their pain.

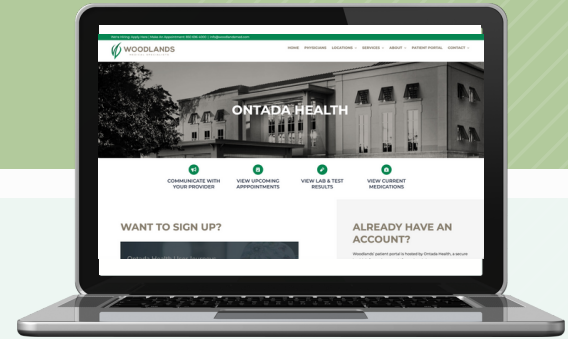
With the exception of a traumatic injury such as a fall or motor vehicle accident, most low back pain is caused by “wear and tear” on the spine over the course of years and does not require surgical correction. Central to this process of “wear and tear” is the weakening and atrophy of a group of muscles located along the spine that is responsible for providing stability and support to the vertebral column, the multifidus.

The multifidus plays a crucial role in maintaining the proper alignment and stability of the spine. As these muscles weaken or become smaller due to lack of use or injury, the surrounding structures (disc, ligaments, and bones of the spine) become overloaded and strained. The strain results in inflammation, nerve compression, and the onset of low back pain. Several factors predispose people to atrophy of the multifidus: sitting for prolonged periods of time, poor posture, and repetitive movements that do not symmetrically activate all parts of the multifidus all lead to atrophy of the muscle over time.

Physical therapy is the primary method to strengthen the multifidus and decrease pain and inflammation caused by its atrophy and weakness. A well-trained physical therapist will specifically target these muscles using a series of stretches and exercises, and then ensure that you understand the routine and can continue it at home.

PRACTICE NEWS

WOODLANDS LAUNCHES A NEW PATIENT PORTAL



Woodlands has changed from the My Care Plus patient portal to the Ontada Health patient portal as of September 25th. Ontada Health is a more modern and up-to-date system that will allow better communication and care communication between our office, our patients, and their caregivers.

If you are already enrolled with the My Care Plus portal, you should have received an invite to Ontada Health via email. All of your records and appointments will transfer to your new Ontada Health account.

If you are not currently enrolled with My Care Plus and would like to enroll with the Ontada Health patient portal, please use the following link - <https://woodlandsmed.com/ontada> - to complete a digital signup.



IN THE NEWS

Will weight loss help prevent or treat arthritis of my hips?

Another study adds to evidence suggesting very little benefit from weight loss in preventing or treating osteoarthritis of the hip.



Most guidelines recommending weight loss for hip osteoarthritis are based on research for knee osteoarthritis. Among patients with osteoarthritis of the knees, weight loss is beneficial at preventing and treating the symptoms of arthritis. Several recent studies have specifically looked at patients with only osteoarthritis of the hips. In these patients, weight loss does not seem to have any effect of prevention.

In the most recent study, researchers sponsored by the National Institute of Health followed 5,509 women (11,018 hips) participating in a longitudinal study of osteoporosis. These women all had a baseline x-ray evaluation of their hips and then a re-evaluation eight years later.

At the second evaluation, about half of the participants weighed within 5% of their study entry weight, 18% had gained weight, and 32% had lost weight.

Among those women with hip arthritis at baseline, the rate of radiologic progression of arthritis was unaffected by weight loss. Similarly, for those patients with no arthritis at baseline, the rate of radiologic development of arthritis was unaffected by weight loss.

Studies like this are important because arthritis of the hip leads to a significant loss of function and quality of life in patients. Telling a patient with arthritis of the hip that weight loss will improve their symptoms will likely only delay them accessing more effective treatment and a quicker return to normal function.

1.- Salis Z et al. Investigation of the association of weight loss with radiographic hip osteoarthritis in older community-dwelling female adults. J Am Geriatr Soc 2023 Aug; 71:2451.

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