

### Orthogo Physical and Aquatic Therapy Newsletter

## LUMBAR SPINAL STENOSIS CAN BE TREATED EFFECTIVELY WITH PHYSICAL THERAPY

### Coming Soon

*Acute low back pain - 50 percent better in 2 visits or less.*

### Clinics

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Lumbar spinal stenosis (LSS) is a disabling condition that occurs in some people as they age. Our spines are made up of individual bones called vertebrae which collectively, surround and protect the spinal cord. Each of these vertebrae is separated by a disc. In some people, as they age, the discs flatten out and bulge into the space reserved for the spinal cord and the nerves that exit off of it. Narrowing of the spinal canal or the lateral openings through which spinal nerves pass, can result in a compression or pinching of the nerves. This may cause chronic pain or numbness in the back, thighs or legs. It may also cause the legs to be weaker, and in rare instances, can affect both bowel and bladder functions.

With the advent of better healthcare our population continues to age at a steady rate, so more and more people are experiencing degenerative diseases like LSS. In fact, about ten years ago LSS was determined to be the most common diagnosis in patients aged 65 and older who had spinal surgery. Not only does this mean that there are a lot of people out there who are suffering the effects of LSS, it also means that a great deal of money is being spent on its treatment. In the U.S. alone, the estimated cost of spinal surgery is 1 billion dollars for the 30,000 spinal surgeries that take place each year.

In an effort to determine whether or not physical therapy can provide a benefit to patients suffering from LSS, researchers in Texas conducted a study of 58 patients with LSS. The goal of the study was to find out whether a program involving flexion therapy would work better than one involving manual therapy.

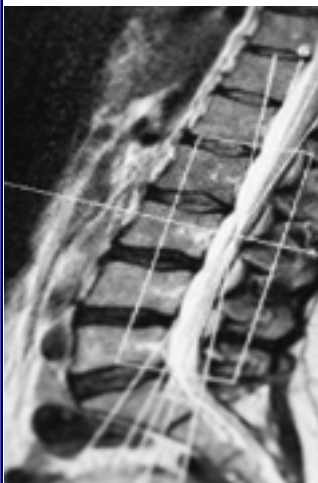
Each of the patients who participated in the study was first examined to develop baseline measurements that would be used to measure the success of the treatment program. Then, the patients were placed into one of two groups:

- » Flexion Exercise and Walking Group: These patients performed lumbar flexion exercises, walked on treadmills, and had ultrasound treatments.
- » Manual Physical Therapy, Exercise, and Walking Group: Patients in this group had hands - on therapy on their spines, hips, and legs. They also performed exercises at the therapy clinic and followed an at-home exercise routine. In addition, patients walked on a treadmill while in a harness that provided body-weight support.

All of the patients in the study attended 12 therapy sessions ranging in length from 45 to 60 minutes each. At the end of the study, both groups showed improvements, but those who were involved in the hands-on therapy group reported that they were happier with their recovery than did those in the flexion group.

The most important information taken away from this study is not just that manual therapy seemed to be a more effective treatment than flexion therapy, but also that LSS can be treated without the trauma of spinal surgery. Patients suffering from LSS should seek the assistance of a qualified physical therapist before considering surgery.

Whitman DSc PT, et. al. Comparison Between Two Physical Therapy Treatment Programs for Patients With Lumbar Spinal Stenosis. SPINE Vol. 31, No. 22, 2006.



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