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MY LOW BACK STRAIN

MAY 2009 NEWSLETTER

I strained my lower back a few weeks ago, doing a twisting exercise that I had frequently done in the past (but not for over a year). Ironically, it's intended to strengthen the transversus abdominus, the deepest girdle-like muscle that protects the low back. I didn't have pain while doing the exercise, but I could hear and feel my lumbar vertebrae clunking and grinding a few times as I did the movements. It didn't hurt afterwards either, but I did notice as the days passed that my body was getting progressively tighter and stiffer. I was applying heat and trying to work out the knots myself, as this typically works well for me in warding off extreme muscle lockdown, however it wasn't working for me this time. So, off to the chiropractor I go, where my heroine Barbara Rodwin advised me that I should have been icing my back (doh!). After 2 or 3 adjustments with her and massage with four different therapists, I'm definitely getting better, but the muscle aches and tightness persist in some places and rove in others. When I go through phases like this, I try to look on the positive side and reflect on how it's a good reminder for me to be on the hurting side for a change. Without that "in-your-shoes" first hand experience, it can be tough to relate to what some patients are going through, and it might not occur to me otherwise what other muscle groups might be affected. As a patient in discomfort, I heard my own voice lamenting "*Why is this happening to me??*", and "*Aiyi-yiii, I had no idea that was so tight/sore*" (I sounded just like some of you, ha ha). And last week when my therapist was working on some extremely painful trigger points in my ribs, something kind of snapped in my brain, and I had a split second urge to backhand her – I settled instead for a few expletives. It reminded me of what I put some of you guys through, and I just *knew* you would delight in me getting some back (kind of a "train the trainer" revenge thing).

So as I struggle to getting back to "normal", the past couple weeks have been reminders of a few things ...

1. When in doubt, use ice not heat! Or if you decided to use heat anyway and it isn't helping, switch to ice instead. This is what I would tell YOU to do! I had reasoned in my own mind that since I didn't seem to have "wrenched" my back (no obvious trauma) and that I wasn't feeling actual pain twinges that ice wasn't needed. I was wrong.
2. Self diagnosis can be faulty (even for us healthcare people) when your mind/body is clouded with discomfort/pain.
3. When my vertebrae make unusual noises and movements ... assume the worst case scenario and go get adjusted right away!
4. Just because I'm having a good day or two without discomfort, I'm not ready to do some shoveling in the garden just yet – must. be. patient. and. gradual.

Thank you **Darcy, Alison, Jeff, Sarah and Barbara** for helping me get through this latest episode. Your excellent work is always appreciated, and I'm fortunate to have a great team of people I can go to for help. Thanks also to my partner for his repeated reminders of caution and being careful with certain movements.

Have a terrific and healthy Spring!