



Body Awareness Physical Therapy

The Body Beat

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Oh, that pain in my bum!

If you've ever had buttock pain, you've probably wondered what could be its cause. One cause could be due to tightness in a specific muscle found deep in the buttock area. Most people know about the gluteus muscles, but not many know about the piriformis muscle which is found in the same area. That pain in your bum just might be caused by Piriformis Syndrome.

The piriformis muscle lies just below the gluteus muscles and is anchored between the tailbone (sacrum) and the bony spot on the side of your hip (greater trochanter of the femur). When the muscle contracts it helps to either lift your thigh out to the side (abduction), twist your thigh (external rotation) or move it backwards (extension). What's interesting about piriformis muscle is that it lies on top of your sciatic nerve.

It's surprising to note that cadaver studies have shown in some instances, rather than



lying underneath the piriformis, the sciatic nerve actually passes right through the muscle's fibers.

Piriformis Syndrome refers to tightness and spasm in the muscle which puts pressure on the sciatic nerve resulting in specific signs and symptoms. These include buttock pain and, at times, numbing or tingling sensations in the buttock that can extend down the leg (sciatica). With palpation, sharp pain can be elicited by applying direct pressure to the piriformis in the center of the buttock region. In chronic states of Piriformis Syndrome, the tightness brings on a lot of swelling and inflammation in the muscle and the outer-covering of the sciatic nerve. This results in the formation of scar tissue adhesions. More pressure on the nerve

What's Inside

Q'n'A.....	2
Graduate of the Month.....	2
Community Corner.....	3
Healthy Hints.....	4

equals more pain. OUCH!

Physical therapy helps to resolve Piriformis Syndrome by decreasing the amount of muscle tightness and spasm, decreasing the swelling and inflammation to the area, and strengthening the surrounding muscles to help promote a healthier environment for the muscles and nerves to coexist.

Treatments include manual therapy techniques such as strain-counterstrain, soft-tissue mobilization, and trigger-point release to minimize muscle tightness and spasm. Ultrasound and phonophoresis decrease swelling and inflammation. Therapeutic exercises for strengthening and flexibility also prove highly effective in alleviating symptoms associated with Piriformis Syndrome.

Q'N'A

Your questions answered by the Licensed Physical Therapists of Body Awareness Physical Therapy.

Q. What causes Piriformis Syndrome?

A. It typically begins with an overstretched piriformis muscle that goes into a protective state of shortening. The shortening places pressure on the sciatic nerve and results in irritation and inflammation.

Q. How long does Piriformis Syndrome usually last ?

A. It will last for as long as the muscle remains tight and the nerve irritated and inflamed.

Q. Should I see my doctor immediately if I suspect having it?

A. Yes. Your doctor can prescribe medications to relieve the muscle spasm and control the inflammation. More importantly, your doctor can prescribe the physical therapy that you'll need to 'nip the problem in the bum.'

Q. What can I do to stretch the muscle?

A. To stretch the piriformis muscle, sit up

straight in a comfortable chair and cross your legs by resting the ankle of the side your stretching onto the opposite knee (e.g. when stretching the right side, cross the right leg over the left keeping the right ankle resting on the left knee.) While maintaining an upright sitting posture, push down on the knee of the side your stretching as you bend forward from the hips until you feel a stretch in the buttock. Hold the stretch for 15-20 seconds and repeat 3 times.

Q. Are there other exercises that I should do?

A. "Clams" are effective in strengthening the posterior gluteus medius muscle which assists in keeping the pelvis from shifting sideways. Lay on your side with the hip you're strengthening up. With your knees and hips bent, tighten the abs (bellybutton to spine), keep the feet fixed and lift the top knee up towards the ceiling as to mimic the opening and closing of a clam shell. Avoid letting the hips roll forward or backwards. Try 2 sets of 10-15 slow and controlled repetitions.

BODY AWARENESS GRADUATE OF THE MONTH

Graduate of the Month: William Flamenco

William Flamenco injured his back last summer while playing basketball. After several months of physical therapy, his doctor recommended surgery. He underwent a microdiscectomy in November and returned to physical therapy. William progressed quickly. He went from not being able to move at all, to doing high level strengthening and core stabilization exercises. He is



maintaining his new-found strength with exercises at home and is now ready to return to work in construction.

I thought I would never be the same, but with the help of the Body Awareness girls I feel great. The worst part of physical therapy was when it ended.

William Flamenco

Community Corner

Body Awareness News

New Services!

Body Awareness Physical Therapy in Costa Mesa is now proudly offering Hand Therapy, specializing in the care of Tennis and Golfer's Elbow, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, deQuervain's Tendonitis, Osteoarthritis, Rheumatoid Arthritis, and Thoracic Outlet Syndrome. Custom splinting is also available.

New Location!

Body Awareness Physical Therapy and Wellness Center in San Clemente offers orthopedic rehabilitation, Pilates personal training and massage therapy.

Grand Opening Celebration on Saturday, April 17th from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

1031 Avenida Pico, suite 201, in San Clemente

Check out our website for more info and directions: www.BodyAwarenessPT.com

New Baby!

Congratulations to the owner of Body Awareness, Chrissie and her husband Glenn, on the birth of their baby girl, Luci Morgan Sulless on Sunday, March 7th. She weighed in at 7 lbs, 1 oz and 19 inches long.



Have a question for our **Q'N'A** column or a suggestion on what you would like to see in the Body Awareness *Body Beat*?

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Healthy Hints

How to prevent the onset of Piriformis Syndrome:

1. **Regular stretching** – Stretch the muscle regularly to minimize tightness. Perform the stretch described in the Q'n'A section every other day
2. **Proper posture in standing**– Avoid standing with the majority of your weight on one side. This causes your pelvis to shift sideways, putting the piriformis muscle on extreme stretch. This compresses the sciatic nerve underneath it and can cause more pain and discomfort.
3. **Keep your gluteus muscles strong**– Focus on strengthening the posterior gluteus medius muscles by doing “clam” exercises. Refer to the Q'n'A section for a description of the clam exercise.



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Physical Therapy

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