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JUNE 2025

Cauda Equina Syndrome: What is it?

Cauda equina syndrome is a rare condition that you may not have heard of, however it can have catastrophic consequences if it is not recognized and treated quickly. This condition occurs in up to two percent of cases of herniated lumbar discs, causing loss of lower leg function, incontinence and lower back pain. It is one of the few medical emergencies related to back pain and can be devastating if symptoms persist.

What causes Cauda Equina Syndrome?

At the end of the spinal cord there is an area of spinal nerves arranged together in a bundle that looks a little like a horse's tail. (In Latin horse tail is cauda equina). These nerves are encased in the spine at the lumbar region.

If, for any reason, these nerves are compressed, nerve signals to the bowel, bladder and lower extremities can become disrupted. Left untreated, this compression can cause permanent paraplegia and incontinence.

Common causes of compression are disc herniation associated with disc degeneration, tumours, inflammatory disorders, spinal stenosis or complications from surgery. Trauma-related cauda equina syndrome from knife wounds or motor vehicle accidents can affect people of all ages.

Signs and Symptoms

This disease is difficult to diagnose because its symptoms mimic many other conditions. However, there are a few symptoms that health professionals know to take very seriously.

These include:

- Sudden loss of reflexes in the legs
- Unusual and rapid onset of Bladder/bowel incontinence or sexual dysfunction
- Pain in one or both legs
- Motor and sensory loss
- Tingling or numbness in the saddle region (Groin and inner thighs)
- Bilateral sciatica

These symptoms may be associated with severe low back pain and if you suddenly experience more than one, particularly incontinence, contact a health professional immediately.

Treatment options

Treatment will depend on the severity and underlying cause of the syndrome. However, in most cases, cauda equina syndrome requires urgent decompression surgery to relieve pressure on the affected nerves. The longer the delay between symptom onset and surgery, the lower the chances of a full recovery.

Most patients will require physiotherapy, pain management, and psychological support—even if treatment is delivered promptly. While this is a very rare condition, public awareness is essential, as early intervention is crucial to prevent permanent damage.

None of the information in this newsletter is a replacement for proper medical advice. Always see a medical professional for advice on your individual injury.

Neck Pain



A common cause of neck pain is thoracic stiffness. Regular exercise that helps keep the spine flexible such as pilates can be extremely beneficial if you suffer from neck pain and headaches.



Brain Teasers

You live in a one story house made entirely of redwood. What colour would the stairs be?



Focus On Buttock Pain

A "pain in the butt" is often used as a funny expression, but when it happens in real life, it can be anything but amusing. Whether it's a dull ache or a sharp jab, pain in the buttocks can make sitting, walking, or even sleeping a challenge. There are a variety of possible causes, and an accurate diagnosis is essential for effective treatment. Here's a breakdown of five of the most common causes of buttock pain.

1. Piriformis Syndrome

This condition occurs when the piriformis muscle—located deep in your buttock—irritates the sciatic nerve that runs beneath it. This can lead to pain, tingling, or numbness in the buttock and sometimes down the back of the leg. It's often mistaken for sciatica but isn't caused by a spinal issue. Overuse, prolonged sitting, or direct trauma to the buttock can all trigger piriformis syndrome.

2. Sciatica

Sciatica refers to pain caused by irritation of the sciatic nerve, typically due to a herniated disc or spinal stenosis in the lower back. While the source is in the spine, the pain often radiates through the buttock

and down the leg. It's usually felt on one side and can be sharp, shooting, or burning. Sitting for long periods often makes it worse.

3. Sacroiliac (SI) Joint Dysfunction

The sacroiliac joints connect your pelvis to the base of your spine. When they become inflamed or move abnormally—due to pregnancy, arthritis, or trauma—they can cause deep pain on one or both sides of the buttock. SI joint pain often worsens with activities like standing up from a seated position, climbing stairs, or even rolling over in bed.

4. Gluteal Muscle Strain

Just like any other muscle, the glutes can be overstretched or injured—especially during exercise, heavy lifting, or sudden movement. A strain or tear in the gluteal muscles causes localized buttock pain that tends to worsen with movement, especially walking uphill or climbing stairs. It may also feel sore to touch.

5. Ischial Bursitis

Also known as "Weaver's Bottom," ischial bursitis occurs when the small fluid-filled sacs (bursae) that cushion the bones in your bottom become inflamed. It's commonly caused by prolonged sitting on

hard surfaces or repetitive motion like cycling. This condition leads to a dull ache or sharp pain at the base of the buttock, especially when sitting.

What to do if you have persistent buttock pain?

In most cases, the first step in resolving pain is getting an accurate diagnosis. Many different conditions can refer pain to the buttock, so it's essential to seek a professional opinion. Your physiotherapist can rule out any serious causes and help identify contributing factors.

None of the information in this newsletter is a replacement for proper medical advice. Always see a medical professional for advice on your individual injury.



Answers: There are no stairs, the house is a single story house

Blue Cheese and Caramelised Onion Pizza

Ingredients

- 2 Pizza Bases
- 2 tbsp Blue Cheese
- 1 cup Rocket
- 1 Green Pear, sliced
- 30gm Parmesan Cheese
- 3 Onions
- 2 tbsp Olive Oil
- 1 tbsp Brown Sugar
- ¼ cup Red Wine Vinegar



Caramelized Onion:

1. Fry onions in olive oil until brown and starting to soften.
2. Add brown sugar and red wine vinegar and simmer until onions are soft and caramelised.

Can be used immediately or stored in the fridge.

Pizzas:

1. Preheat the oven to 180° Celsius.
2. Spread blue cheese dip over the pizza base, cover with caramelised onion and place in oven for 10 minutes. Remove and place sliced pear pieces over pizza and cook for a further 5 minutes.
3. Remove from oven and place fresh rocket over pizza.

Add cracked pepper and parmesan slices to taste.

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