Natural Sciatica Relief System

Personal Workbook
Dear Friend,

Congratulations on having taken the first step toward freeing yourself from lower back pain once and for all! You’ll soon have in your hands the program we call the Natural Sciatica Relief System - a resource which will guide you through the process of relieving your pain, identifying what caused it in the first place, and putting a plan into action to ensure that you never have to miss out on work, family time, or leisure on account of lower back pain ever again.

If you’re in pain currently, then I know that every day is a struggle for you. However, you can rest easy knowing that our system is on its way to your front door even as your read this.

You have taken the first - and greatest - step toward pain-free living by deciding to act to eliminate your sciatic pain. By committing yourself to regaining control of your life, you are declaring that you’re no longer willing to let back pain have the final word.

This workbook will serve as your guidebook and journal, helping you to use our program in the most effective way possible and to keep track of your progress. Feel free to read the first few pages before your copy of the program arrives, but otherwise just relax and know that help is on the way.

Sincerely,

PATRICK KILCHERMANN

P.S. If you need immediate relief when your program arrives, use the “Universal Relief Stretches” under the “Find Immediate Relief” menu on Disc 2. Just be sure to return to the beginning of the program as quickly as possible to ensure that you get the best possible results!
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Before Your Program Arrives

If you downloaded this workbook immediately after completing your order, then you may have a few days remaining before your copy of the Natural Sciatica Relief System arrives. There are a number of important things you can do now, even before you begin the program, to help speed up the pain relief process.

Remember that everything a human being can do to promote health - exercise, stretching, medication, and even surgery - only helps facilitate the body’s natural ability to heal. In this sense, while your knowledge may differ, your ability to relieve your pain and heal your body is the same as your doctor’s. All either of you can do is promote the natural processes that are truly beyond our control.

So, here are some ways that you can begin to increase your health and your awareness of your own body before your copy of our program arrives:

1) **Prepare Yourself Mentally and Emotionally** - A significant part of our experience of pain is our response to it. Chronic or debilitating pain can alter your mood and negatively affect your perception of yourself and others. Begin to take the steps necessary to reduce your stress by removing its causes or removing yourself from negative situations entirely. Stay positive in all circumstances and know that even when situations are beyond our control, we can still decide how we’ll respond to them.

2) **Investigate Your Current Habits** - Complete the “Initial Pain Assessment” on page 8 of this workbook in order to get a more complete idea of how your body responds to your current daily routine. Pain is a form of communication from your body, so you may have to respond to its directives by temporarily discontinuing activities which cause your lower back pain to flare up. However, unlike the average doctor or physical therapist, we aren’t going to tell you that you won’t be able to take part in your favorite activities again. In fact, our program is designed to both relieve your pain and rehabilitate your body, so that by the time you’re finished you will not only be pain free, but you’ll be stronger and less prone to future injury.

3) **Warm Up Your Vulnerable Muscles** - In our program, we’re going to take you through a guided warm-up before every stretch and exercise routine. Warming up your body prevents injury, so try incorporating light walking or a hot shower before taking part in physical activities that are already part of your routine.
4) **Make Hydration a Habit** - Every health or fitness resource you encounter will encourage hydration as a means of increasing your physical well-being, and we’re no different. However, we want to add some explanation to this common directive. First, it’s important to know that the recommended eight daily glasses of water are best used by your body when spaced equally throughout your waking hours. Keep a glass handy at all times and tally up your daily consumption in a planner. Second, we must remember that hydration is a great facilitator of the body’s natural healing processes. Your bodily fluids depend on adequate hydration to operate efficiently, so drinking plenty of water throughout the day will speed up your pain relief process.

5) **Improve Your Diet** - Like hydration, good nutrition can accelerate your healing. There are innumerable diet fads and nutrition gurus out there, but much of their advice can be boiled down to two important points: 1. Take a daily multivitamin - AND - 2. Eat less (and fewer) processed foods. Multivitamins geared to your gender, age, and life circumstances are like a nutritional insurance policy and compared to the equivalent dietary value in groceries, they are reasonably priced. However, vitamins are not a substitute for a healthy diet. A good rule of thumb is to purchase foods in the most raw form available. The more a food has been processed, the less healthy it tends to be. There are always exceptions, but generally the longer the ingredient list, the less healthy the food will be.

6) **Analyze Your Posture** - No matter what the immediate cause of your lower back pain is (injury, trauma, muscular dysfunction, etc.), the ultimate cause is almost always related to muscle weakness and imbalance caused by your lifestyle. Think about how much time you spend sitting, standing, driving, and sleeping each day. If you sit at a desk for several hours each day, try just walking around the room for five minutes every hour. Avoid exacerbating your difficulties by choosing leisure activities that demand a different posture from that which you maintain throughout the work day. If sleeping aggravates your lower back pain, try sleeping on your side rather than your stomach or back. Use a less fluffy pillow and place a folded towel or blanket under your hips to encourage a more natural curvature in your spine.

**A Warning About Bedrest:** With the exception of cases of severe trauma, we seldom recommend that back pain sufferers devote more than a couple of days to bedrest. Prolonged bedrest, medication, and surgery are necessary in some cases, but they cannot increase the flexibility or strength of your back. The sooner you begin a stretch and exercise routine, the sooner you can return to normal activity. Ask your doctor about the dangers of muscle atrophy associated with prolonged bed rest.
Natural Sciatica Relief System Checklist

If you really want to eliminate your sciatic pain and ensure that it will never return, it is vital that you follow the step-by-step plan that we have created to identify the cause of your pain, relieve that pain, and ultimately restore your body to a state of muscle symmetry. Keep track of when you complete each step of the program and resolve to stick with it until you are finally living the pain-free life you have always wanted.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Completed</th>
<th>Milestones in Your Relief Process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>____________</td>
<td><strong>Step #1:</strong> Read Through “Before Your Program Arrives” (Page 5-6)</td>
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<td>____________</td>
<td><strong>Step #2:</strong> Performed the “Initial Pain Assessment” (Page 8)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #3:</strong> Watch “Get the Facts” (Disc #1)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #4:</strong> Identify the Cause of Your Sciatic Pain (Disc #1, Page 9)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #5:</strong> Watch “Begin Your Treatment” (Disc #1)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #6:</strong> Watch “Reduce Your Pain” (Disc #2)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #7:</strong> Begin an Immediate Relief Routine (Twice Daily)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #8:</strong> Perform Immediate Relief Routine Completely (1st Time)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #9:</strong> Complete One Pain-Free Week (Two Routines Daily)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #10:</strong> Identify Your Muscle Imbalances (Disc #2, Page 11-14)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #11:</strong> Watch “Get Complete Control” (Disc #2)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #12:</strong> Design Your Individual Relief Plan (Disc #3, Page 15)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #13:</strong> Begin an Imbalance Correction Routine (Use for 1 Month)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #14:</strong> Use “Identify Imbalances” to See Your Progress (Disc #2)</td>
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<td><strong>Step #15:</strong> Cease to Exhibit Symptoms of Imbalances (Page 16)</td>
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Performing an Initial Pain Assessment

Before you begin to use this program, you’ll want to document the level of pain you experience in different postures and at various activity levels. This will allow you to quantify your progress as you devote time to eliminating your pain using the “Immediate and Extended Relief” portion of our program.

Use the pain scale described below to gauge your experience of your own pain. You don’t need to induce your sciatica symptoms in order to complete this chart. Instead, try to recall the pain as you felt it during the activities described. Leave some blank if necessary and add activities specific to your lifestyle.

Your pain is communication from your body, so you should never dismiss it or “push through it.” Pain higher than a “3” on this scale demands a response, and a rating higher than a “5” will likely demand that you immediately cease your current activity, while a “9” or “10” will probably demand medical intervention. Space has been left for you to note where in your body the pain is felt as well as any additional description you feel to be noteworthy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Pain Experienced</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>After Sleeping (Early Morning)</td>
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<td>Standing (Prior to Daily Activity)</td>
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<td>During Mild Exercise</td>
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<td>Lying Down to Sleep</td>
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Identifying the Four Common Causes of Sciatica

As you learn the environmental and physical factors behind each of the four common causes of sciatica in Step 2 of “The Source of Sciatica,” record your findings here. For immediate relief regardless of the cause of your pain, try our “Universal Relief Stretches” on Disc 2. Keep in mind that each positive result contributes to an overall identification, but only a doctor can give you the certainty of a diagnosis.

Piriformis Syndrome

Environmental Factors:
- ___ I spend 4+ hours at a desk daily.
- ___ I drive 2+ hours each day.
- ___ My sciatic pain arises from sitting for long periods of time.
- ___ My pain manifests as numbness in one or both legs. (Which? L -OR- R)
- ___ My sciatica manifests as tingling or pain in my thighs and/or calves.

Physical Tests:
- Toe-Drop Test - Record how far each foot departed from the starting position.
  - L: _______           R: _______
- Pressure Test - Were you able to induce symptoms after 30 seconds? After 1 min?
  - L: ____/____           R: ____/____

Bulging or Herniated Disk

Environmental Factors:
- ___ My pain arose after a specific strain (sneezing, lifting a box, shoveling snow).
- ___ I would describe my pain as “deep” and “sharp.”
- ___ My pain is felt especially on one side of my lower back and down the leg on the same side. (Which side? L -OR- R)

Physical Tests:
- Straight Leg Raise - At what angle (0-90) did pain begin on each side?
  - L: _______           R: _______
- Did decompression bring relief? (Y/N) For how long? _______

Spinal Stenosis

Environmental Factors:
- ___ My sciatica appears as pain, tingling, weakness, or numbness in both legs.
- ___ I am over the age of fifty.
- ___ I experienced no trauma or injury prior to my sciatic pain first occurring.
- ___ My pain increases when standing and when bending my spine backwards.

Physical Test:
- Shopping Cart Test - Did this position bring your relief? (Y/N) For how long? _______

Spondylolisthesis

Environmental Factors:
- ___ My pain increases when I stand or walk.
- ___ I alter my stride to reduce my pain.
- ___ I feel a slipping sensation when sitting up or standing up.
- ___ My pain worsens when I bend backward.
- ___ My hamstrings feel noticeably tight.

Physical Test:
- Straight Leg Raise - At what angle (0-90) did pain begin on each side?
  - L: _______           R: _______
Your Pain Relief Journal

Use the chart below to record your perception of your pain after each day during your time with the pain relief routines on “Immediate and Extended Relief.” After a pain-free week of performing your routine twice daily, you will be ready to move on to identifying and correcting your muscle imbalances.

1 = No pain at all          6 = Deep, strong pain, may be distracting
2 = Minor, easily forgotten ache or soreness 7 = Sharp pain, demands attention
3 = Pain is slight, easily ignored, superficial 8 = Severe pain, halts normal activity
4 = Noticeable but light pain, brief, dull 9 = Extreme pain, clouds thinking
5 = Significant pain, sharp but tolerable 10 = Excruciating pain, all-consuming

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Note: It isn’t unusual for a longtime sciatica sufferer to spend a number of weeks with our pain relief program. Be patient, give yourself time to heal, and expand this journal if necessary.
Identifying Your Muscle Imbalances

Record your findings in this section of the workbook as you learn about the visual and physical indicators of the four muscle imbalances which cause lower back pain in Step 3 of “Immediate and Extended Relief.”

Taking Excellent Identification Photos:

- Wear close-fitting athletic shorts and a tight shirt or sports bra...
- Stand on a hard, flat surface...
- Put your arms down with your hands at your side and stand comfortably...
- Hold the camera at approximately waist-height...

Front View

Back View
Taking good photos at this juncture will make identifying your imbalances much easier. If you wish, you can paste your photos directly into this book so that they are all in one place when you are ready to check on your progress.

If you take new photos each time you return to this portion of the program, you’ll be able to see just how dramatically your posture has improved over time. This isn’t just a cosmetic improvement either, because good posture indicates muscle symmetry which is key to long term pain relief and overall health.

Each time you take new pictures of yourself, try to do so in approximately the same spot from the same distance. If the photos are similar enough, you’ll be able to actually measure your progress toward correcting your muscle imbalances.
Identifying Your Muscle Imbalances (Cont.)

Record your findings here as we review the tests to confirm each of the four muscle imbalances during Step 3 of “Immediate and Extended Relief.” Each positive result contributes to overall identification, but only a combination of photographic and physical evidence should lead you to pursue correction for an imbalance.

Identifying the Hunched Shoulders Imbalance

*Photographic Evidence* - View right and left profile

**Positive Indicators** (Check all that apply):

- ___ Rounded shoulders
- ___ Head slightly forward
- ___ Arms pulled forward, rotated inward
- ___ Ears forward of shoulders

*Physical Assessments*

#1 Supine Pectoral Stretch - Elbows unable to touch floor when relaxed?     Y/N
  Elbows approximately ____ in. off floor.

#2 Prone Arm Lift - Unable to lift arms 2 or 3 inches off the floor? Y/N

#3 Overhead Arm Lift - Unable to lift arms 2 or 3 inches off the floor? Y/N

#4 Pectoral Stretch - Unable to rotate 45 degrees away from RIGHT arm? Y/N
  Able to rotate approximately ____ degrees.
  Unable to rotate 45 degree away from LEFT arm?     Y/N
  Able to rotate approximately ____ degrees.

**Total Positive Indicators:** ______

Identifying the Elevated Hip Imbalance

*Photographic Evidence* - View photos from front and back

**Positive Indicators** (Check all that apply, note high side):

- ___ Visible difference in height of hips
- ___ Creases in midriff indicate hip height disparity
- ___ Difference visible using straight edge

*Physical Assessments*

#1 Bend Test - One hand higher than the other? Which? Y/N | L/R
  The higher hand is approximately ____ in. higher.

#2 Inner Thigh Stretch - One side more restricting? Which? Y/N | L/R

#3 Lower Back Bend - One side less flexible? Which? Y/N | L/R

**Total Positive Indicators:** ______
Identifying a Forward Tilted Pelvis

*Photographic Evidence* - View right and left profile

**Positive Indicators** (Check all that apply)

- Beltline higher in back than front
- Extreme curvature at the small of the back
- Forward lean in the upper body

**Physical Assessments**

1. **Pelvic Point** - Fingers point toward floor with greater than 10 degree tilt? Y/N
   The tilt is approximately ____ degrees.

2. **Supine Flexibility** - Flexibility restricted by your lower back (not glutes)? Y/N

3. **Hip Flexor Stretch** - Unable to tilt pelvis in kneeling position? Y/N
   Movement restricted by hip flexors (both sides)? Y/N

*Total Positive Indicators: _____*

Identifying a Backward Tilted Pelvis

*Photographic Evidence* - View right and left profile

**Positive Indicators** (Check all that apply)

- Beltline higher in front than back
- Upper body leans backward
- Lower back appears flat
- Knees bent to balance torso tilt

**Physical Assessments**

1. **Pelvic Point** - Fingers parallel to floor or pointed slightly toward ceiling? Y/N
   The tilt is approximately ____ degrees.

2. **Supine Back Rest** - Unable to place hand beneath lower back? Y/N

3. **Glute Flex Test** - Tightness in glutes restricts stretching? Y/N
   Similar tightness on both sides? Y/N
Creating Your Individual Relief Plan

Once you have determined which muscle imbalances you have, it's time to create your Individual Relief Plan. If you only identified a single muscle imbalance, you'll be performing the corresponding imbalance correction routine once per day, five days per week. If you identified two imbalances, you'll be alternating the two corresponding routines throughout the entire week.

Below we’ll show you some examples of initial schedule designs as well as scaled back designs to employ once you cease to exhibit the symptoms of an imbalance. Keep in mind that once you establish a schedule you’ll be sticking to it for a solid month before performing the imbalance identification tests again to check your progress.

One Imbalance (Same Routine 5 Days Per Week):

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<th>Sunday</th>
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<th>Wednesday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Rest</td>
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Two Imbalances (Alternating Routines 7 Days Per Week):

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<th>Sunday</th>
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<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Hunched Sh.</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Hunched Sh.</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Hunched Sh.</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Hunched Sh.</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Hunched Sh.</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
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Three Imbalances (Rotating Through All Routines 7 Days Per Week):

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<td>Elevated Hip</td>
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**Important Note:** If you strongly identify with two imbalances, but identify less strongly with a third, then you should keep your routine simple and treat the two more significant imbalances first. Avoid alternating through three routines if possible. Always assess for all four imbalances when doing a progress check.
Scaling Back Imbalance Correction Routines

Below are some examples of how to scale back your routine after you have ceased to exhibit the symptoms of one or more imbalances. Remember that muscle imbalances are the result of our lifestyle and they will begin to reform as soon as we cease to counteract them. The schedule below are only suggestions, so position your rest and exercise days as you wish.

**One Imbalance (Ceased to Exhibit Symptoms):**

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<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
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<td>Elevated Hip</td>
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**Two Imbalances (Ceased to Exhibit Symptoms of Hunched Shoulders):**

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<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Hunched Sh.</td>
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<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Rest</td>
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**Two Imbalances (Ceased to Exhibit Symptoms of Both):**

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<td>Elevated Hip</td>
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**Three Imbalances (Ceased to Exhibit Symptoms of Hunched Shoulders):**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bckwrd. Tilt</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Bckwrd Tilt</td>
<td>Hunched Sh.</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Bckwrd Tilt</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
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**Three Imbalances (Also Ceased to Exhibit Symptoms of Elevated Hip):**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Bckwrd Tilt</td>
<td>Hunched Sh.</td>
<td>Bckwrd Tilt</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Bckwrd Tilt</td>
<td>Rest</td>
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**Three Imbalances (Ceased to Exhibit Symptoms of All Three):**

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<td>Rest</td>
<td>Bckwrd Tilt</td>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Elevated Hip</td>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Hunched Sh.</td>
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How to Talk to Your Physician...

As beneficial as the innovations of last century in science, especially in medicine, have been, the increasing cost and diminishing quality of professional health care have made receiving medical attention an unpleasant and unpredictable experience. Moreover, despite the accessibility of sound, well-tested information, more people than ever put themselves blindly into the hands of the medical community (and the insurance companies) rather than seeking to take charge of their own health.

However, you aren’t one of those people. You aren’t willing to give up your right to be an active participant in your own healing process. Therefore, we wanted to share with you a short report on how to go about working with your physician in order to get the best care possible. We have a few general tips to give you, followed by our list of the top 10 questions you should always ask your doctor. This advice is specifically meant for those who suffer from lower back pain, but can employed in almost any circumstances.

Perhaps the most important change you can make in the way you deal with medical professionals is simply realizing that they - like all other business people - are subject to consumer scrutiny. In some cases you may be limited by your insurance provider, but you should always “shop around” for a doctor whose personality and philosophy mesh well with your own. Doctors compete for business like every other professional. Ask frank questions about the rate at which the doctor prescribes medications, the percentage of his or her patients referred to a surgeon, etc. Don’t be willing to give your business to a doctor with poor statistics or who treats you or your family poorly.

There is a new trend toward “rating” doctors using a variety of online systems, but we recommend that you find out for yourself what you think of a specific physician. Online reviewers often care more about immediate solutions to their pain than about their long term health. On account of this short-sightedness they give low ratings to doctors who don’t immediately recommend them for surgery or prescribe them an impressive-sounding pain medications. Take the time to inter-
view available physicians before you decide on a primary care provider. If a doctor is unwilling to answer a few questions without billing you for a consultation, they may not have the time to deal with you on a personal basis as a patient either.

During any interaction with your doctor, you should feel comfortable enough to ask specific questions about your own health and wellbeing. Never be content with ignorance regarding your symptoms, diagnosis, or the medication you are being prescribed. Even if you are familiar with a term generally, you should take the time to understand specifically what is happening in your body.

Similarly, you need to ask what your diagnosis means in your individual instance because many terms are less precise than they seem and may describe all disorders of a certain organ or all individuals with a specific symptom. Ask also what you should do or avoid to prevent the malady from recurring and what the intended effect of a prescribed medication is. Consider whether the risks (side effects) outweigh the benefits, especially if other treatment options are available.

Finally, our last general tip for individuals who wish to be active participants in their health care is to begin your interactions with your physician as you would with your mechanic. Unless you have some previous relationship or recommendation that leads you to trust them inherently, you need to be skeptical enough to ask clarifying questions and ultimately get a second opinion if surgery, an unusual diagnosis, or a long-lasting prescription is involved. After speaking to your doctor, it's also worthwhile to investigate your diagnosis and any medications you have been prescribed using reputable websites and publications available at your library.

**10 Questions To Ask Your Doctor...**

**1. What is the immediate and ultimate cause of my pain?** - One of the most common misunderstandings surrounding doctor/patient interactions is the difference between symptoms, immediate causes, and ultimate causes. Symptoms are usually treated with medication, immediate causes with medication, therapy, or surgery, and ultimate causes (despite their importance) are often only addressed in the form of friendly advice.

A patient with debilitating foot pain might be prescribed a painkiller for his symptoms, and perhaps shoe inserts to decrease the impact which led to the pain, but the lifestyle choices which cause impact-related trauma in the first place (daily runs
on cement sidewalk, poor nutrition, or perhaps a weight problem) may be ignored completely or mentioned without particular emphasis during a check-up. Your symptoms are why you went to the doctor in the first place, but the immediate and ultimate causes of those symptoms are what you and the doctor need to work together to treat. It is typically the patients who are willing to work as hard or harder than their doctors who triumph over their pain.

2. What are my options? - Whenever you receive a diagnosis, you need to know that the confirmation of a malady is not the same thing as deciding on a treatment plan. These are two distinct steps and they should always be separated by a careful consideration of the available alternatives. In some cases (like appendicitis) your choice may be very clear, but in most cases you will have a number of treatment options to choose from or to use in conjunction. Surgery is seldom an inevitable outcome.

3. How can I ensure that my pain is less likely to return? - Surgery, bedrest, medication, and therapy can often remove the immediate cause of your symptoms, but changing your lifestyle might be the difference between a managed and a chronic condition. Ask your doctor what steps you can take to become your own best caregiver by changing your lifestyle in a way which ensures that your condition will not be the cause for further medical intervention.

4. What role do stretches and exercise have in my recovery process? - Physical fitness is not a guarantee of good health, but targeted exercises and stretches can make a big difference for many who suffer with chronic pain. Even if your pain isn’t directly related to muscle and tendon dysfunction, light exercise aids blood flow and in doing so accelerates your body’s natural healing processes. Remember to warm-up before beginning any exercise routine and to take the necessary precautions to avoid creating muscle imbalances.

5. What do you recommend regarding hydration and nutrition? - A significant part of maintaining our bodies is giving them the right fuel at the right time. Ask your doctor about recommending a multivitamin appropriate to your age, gender, and lifestyle. Your doctor may also have specific recommendations regarding certain supplements which could aid in your recovery and in long term management of your pain. A good doctor will recognize that hydration and nutrition are an important part of our overall health and will be more than willing to talk to you about what role they have in your individual case.
6. **What are the negative side effects of bed rest?** - Remember that just because your insurance covers a recommended treatment, that doesn’t mean that it is the best solution for your condition. Bedrest is often recommended for those whose pain is caused by a specific injury or trauma; however, there is nothing that bedrest can do to increase the strength or flexibility of your back. Because bedrest is only useful for ensuring that further trauma does not interfere with the healing process, ask your doctor why bedrest might be needed and when you can begin to resume your normal routine.

7. **What is intended use (and any side effects) of this medication?** - If your physician feels as though medication is necessary for controlling your symptoms, you need to ask what the medication is meant to do and what else it might do in addition to the intended function. There may be a number of medications appropriate to your situation, so ask which has the longest history of success and the fewest side effects. Remember that medication, like bedrest, is only there to help your body begin the healing process, so you need to know what will happen when you stop taking the medication and whether extended use might lead to dependence or addiction.

8. **How often do you see patients with this particular problem?** - Your physician’s experience (like that of your mechanic) is relevant to their ability to help you solve the problem at hand. Feel free to ask straightforwardly how often they have seen patients with your current symptoms or diagnosis. In most cases, you will still prefer a your primary care physician to any expensive specialist, but if you feel uncomfortable with your doctor’s limited experience, feel free to ask for a referral.

9. **How many of your patients are able to avoid surgery?** - If it is important to you to avoid surgery and relieve your pain in a more natural way, don’t be shy about asking your doctor how many of their patients end up being referred to a surgeon. As with any other individual, a doctor’s past record is a good indicator of what you can expect from them in the future. Many doctors will be frank about their statistics compared to the national averages.

10. **How will surgery affect my long term health?** - Only a very small percentage of back pain sufferers have a condition which requires surgery, but if your physician is insistent and you have exhausted your other options (and gotten a second opinion), you still need to get the facts about how surgery could impact your life. After your surgery will likely come an extended period of bedrest, during which time
your muscles will atrophy. Unless you take the time to set up a plan for returning your back to a healthy level of strength and flexibility, surgery may be the beginning of a much more limited lifestyle for you. Even if you do decide to proceed with surgery, stretches and exercises will still be a big part of your treatment in the form of rehabilitation. Your doctor should be willing to give you an accurate idea of how long your recovery will take and how accurate his estimates have been in the past.