Is Physical Therapy or Surgery a Better Option for Lumbar Spinal Stenosis?

For those who don’t know me, my name is Ryan Werme and I am a new Fitness Specialist at the Transitions Training Studio. I recently finished my bachelor’s degree in Movement Science at U of M. In the fall of 2016, I will enter graduate school to study Physical Therapy.

Recently, I came across an article on the Harvard Health Publications website that cited a study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine. It asked the question; “Is physical therapy better or worse than surgery for lower back pain?” Specifically, they were investigating lumbar spinal stenosis, and the advantages and disadvantages of physical therapy interventions versus surgical interventions.

One in 10 adults experience a narrowing of the spinal canal which is where the spinal cord and nerves run through the spine. This condition is called spinal stenosis and can be due to a variety of reasons including: degeneration of intervertebral disks, ligaments, or the facet joints. The narrowing puts pressure on nerves in the spinal canal, which can lead to pain in the groin, buttocks and upper thigh that is worse while standing or during spinal extension. The current study, which was published in the Annals of Internal Medicine in early April, compared 83 people who received a laminectomy, and 84 people who received a physical therapy intervention program. A laminectomy is the removal of the lamina, a portion of the vertebrae to relieve pressure within the spinal canal. Both groups showed similar improvements in physical function and reduction in pain. However, physical therapy was associated with less complications. 25% of individuals in the surgery group had complications (repeat surgery or surgery-related infection), compared to 10% in the physical therapy group that reported worsening symptoms.

The results of this study suggest that spinal surgery should be looked at as a last resort. If conservative methods, NSAIDs and pain relievers, don’t work, then individuals should consider physical therapy or some other sort of exercise program before considering surgery.

Always consult with your doctor before making any decision related to your health. The staff here at the Transition’s Studio would be happy to help you start a “back safe” exercise program.

Happy Spring! The temperatures are finally starting to warm up!
Ryan Werme, BS Fitness Specialist

Spring back into fitness with the help of a Heart Rate Monitor!

Heart Rate Monitors (HRM) take on various sizes, shapes and colors, but how do you know which one will suit your needs? In the late 80’s you might remember the first heart rate monitor that came on the market made by Polar called the “Polar Beat”. It had one function: measuring heart rate. Today, there are many different companies competing for your dollar and offering numerous options. Most heart rate monitors tell time, include a stop watch, and other helpful settings. For example, you can program a specific target heart rate (HR) range, and if your HR exceeds the max number, you will be alerted by an audible chirp from your watch! It can be a nice reminder to you that you might be working harder than necessary.

I don’t consider myself a techno-geek, but I use a Garmin brand heart rate monitor that not only measures my heart rate, but also acts as a GPS navigation device. Whether I’m mountain biking or walking I can measure my distance and speed in addition to marking my path along the way. When I return home I can download the information on my watch to my computer and view the course I road or walked and track the corresponding heart rates in each area. In the end, researching different brands and models will help inform and guide your decision on the best HRM for you. To find out more about heart rate monitors I suggest taking a look at these websites:

www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/heart-rate-monitor.html
http://www.ems.com/shop/index.jsp?categoryId=3942310

Happy biking and hiking!
Britt Michel
Exercise Physiologist
Transitions Studio Manager
What Exercise Researchers are Saying Lately...

Balance is something that we sometimes take for granted in our youth and middle age. It isn’t until later in life that it can become an issue that will determine our level of independence and in more serious cases an issue of life and death. However, just like our muscle strength, cardiovascular capacity and flexibility, balance will become compromised if not addressed.

More recently than ever, there has been an increasing awareness of implications of falls and the importance of balance programs in preventative medicine. According to the Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy, falls are the leading cause of traumatic brain injury and fractures in older adults, and for individuals aged 65 and older, falls outpace motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of unintentional death by several thousand.

All ages can benefit from balance programs as long as the program is progressively more challenging over time. There can be a significant drop in fall risk in adults ages 65 and older within the first year of following a balance exercise program. For a program to be effective it must be structured, progressive, challenging, and performed at least 2-3 days per week. Research also suggests that the optimal program for improving balance is one which incorporates strength training along with the specific stability exercises. For example, hamstring curls and heel raises will help with muscles used in fall prevention, and then balance exercises, such as single leg standing and tandem stance, will help improve stability. Individuals who incorporate moderate to high challenging balance exercises to their strength training routine show a lower fall risk than those who do not.

Progression should move from holding with both hands to no hands; from wide stance to narrow stance; and from stable surfaces to unstable surfaces. When performing balance exercises, have a counter or chair nearby for support if needed.

Losing balance is natural; however, repetitive falling is not. With on-going practice, balance can be improved and falls can be reduced.

Source: Academy of Geriatric Physical Therapy

Healthy Recipe: Lemon Chicken Stir-Fry

Ingredients:
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 lemon
- 1/2 cup reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 3 tablespoons reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 10 ounces mushrooms, halved or quartered
- 1 cup diagonally sliced carrots, (1/4 inch thick)
- 2 cups snow peas, (6 ounces), stems and strings removed
- 1 bunch scallions, cut into 1-inch pieces, white and green parts divided
- 1 tablespoon chopped garlic

Preparation:
1. Grate 1 teaspoon lemon zest and set aside. Juice the lemon and whisk 3 tablespoons of the juice with broth, soy sauce and cornstarch in a small bowl.
2. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken and cook, stirring occasionally, until just cooked through, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate with tongs. Add mushrooms and carrots to the pan and cook until the carrots are just tender, about 5 minutes. Add snow peas, scallion whites, garlic and the reserved lemon zest. Cook, stirring, until fragrant, 30 seconds. Whisk the broth mixture and add to the pan; cook, stirring, until thickened, 2 to 3 minutes. Add scallion greens and the chicken and any accumulated juices; cook, stirring, until heated through, 1 to 2 minutes.
3. Serve with either rice noodles or brown rice.

Nutrition: 225 calories; 6 g fat (1 g sat, 3 g mono); 63 mg cholesterol; 14 g carbohydrates; 0 g added sugars; 27 g protein; 3 g fiber; 448 mg sodium; 796 mg potassium

Total prep time: 40 minutes

http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes/lemon_chicken_stir_fry.html
In recognition of the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition National Physical Fitness and Sports Month, we challenge all adults to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity every day for the month of May and June.

Did you know that regular physical activity increases your chances of living a longer, healthier life? It also reduces your risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, and some types of cancer. Yet in the United States, less than 5% of adults actually exercise for 30 minutes per day, and only 1/3 of the population meets the physical activity guidelines per week (fitness.gov.) set out by the president’s council of fitness, sports and nutrition (fitness.gov)

The Physical Activity Guidelines for recommend the following:
1. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity each week. Moderate activity includes activities such as fast walking, dancing, swimming, and yard work.
2. Do strength training with weight machines, dumbbells, exercise bands or even your own body weight at least 2 times per week.

Physical activity is for everyone. No matter what shape you are in, you can find activities that work for you. Together, we can rise to the challenge and get more active during the months of May and June!

Join us in the Transitions Training Studio to get started! We offer a wide variety of programs to help you get active, from Functional Fitness for Older Adults, to studio memberships, the Bariatric Conditioning Program, and Personal Training. We can also recommend that you look into our other classes including Yoga, Pilates, or BioCored.

If you are looking to get exercise outside of a gym setting, try a walk through one of our many local metro parks or botanical gardens, visit a local museum, or just walk around downtown. You could try something new and take up a new activity like bicycling, golf or a dance class!

What our current members are saying:
“I enjoy that the atmosphere in which I can do the exercises is unhurried, suggestions are helpful, and readiness to make changes I need to be able to continue.”
“I love the individual programs designed just for me!”
“Excellent equipment and personalized monitoring to assure improvement without damage.”

For more information, visit us at: http://pmr.med.umich.edu/transitions

There are plenty of reasons to stay active throughout your life. Some include: lowering your risk for heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Also, some of us don’t “think” about it, but maintaining a healthy diet and exercise routine can be very helpful in sustaining optimal brain function.

According to researchers, one new case of dementia is detected every four seconds globally. They estimate that by the year 2050, more than 115 million people worldwide will have some form of dementia.

So, to reduce your chance: Start or keep exercising! Treating your body well can enhance your ability to process and recall information. Exercise improves circulation and increases oxygen to your brain and reduces your risk for disorders that lead to memory loss.

Find exercises that you enjoy! A class, a personal trainer, recreational sport or yard work.

Submitted by Chrissy Parker, MS, CSCS, CES

Featured Program: Otago Balance Program coming soon!

Falls are common in individuals aged 63 years and older and are the leading cause of injury. Falls can have serious consequences, including trauma, pain, reduced function, loss of confidence in performing everyday activities, loss of independence, and even death.

Strength, power, balance and reaction time are considered the most modifiable risk factors for falls in older adults. Individuals, even in their 90’s, can improve their strength and balance to achieve stability and avoid falls.

The Otago Exercise Program was developed and tested by researchers at the University of Otago Medical School in New Zealand. The overall exercise program was effective in reducing falls and the number of injuries resulting from falls by 35%! It was found to be very effective in both males and females.

The Transition Training Studio will introduce exercises of the Otago Program in the Dynamic Movement Course for Older Adults starting in June. Class times will be Monday and Wednesday from 11-11:45am instructed by Sara Randazzo, Certified Pilates Instructor and Physical Therapist Assistant. Class will be limited to 10 participants. If you would like to reserve your spot for the class please contact Britt Michel at 734-763-4990 or email at brittm@med.umich.edu
We're on the web! Check out our new website!

pmr.med.umich.edu/transitions

Member Testimonial: Henry VanDyke

Following several years of helpful medical care and guided physical therapy sessions (for lower back pain) by University of Michigan Health System personnel, my attention was directed to the program of the Transitions Training Studio. I investigated, enrolled and have appreciated the pain relief and lift of physical being aided by the twice-a-week half hour exercise session with Chrissy Parker, Exercise Physiologist.

I have not worked out at a gym since high school, many years ago. Since coming to exercise sessions at the Transition Training Studio my lower back pain has been controlled and has permitted me to experience greater personal activity. Studio personnel have helped guide me through appropriate exercise activity at the site and at home. They have carefully admonished me when I faltered. They provided an activity environment which accepts my limitations and encourages me to “carry on”. I have found the Transitions Training Studio program gives me impetus for more meaningful living. The exercise activity is a creative venture in maintaining my activity.

Exercise of the Month: Cat-Camel Stretch

Instructions:
1. Start on the ground on your hands and knees, with your back flat.
2. Let your back sway by pressing your stomach towards the ground without bending your elbows. At the same time, try to lift you buttocks towards the ceiling (top image). Hold this position for 5-10 seconds.
3. Return to the starting position of flat back.
4. Allow your head to droop and round your back towards the ceiling until you feel a nice stretch in your upper, middle, and lower back (bottom image). Hold this position for 5-10 seconds.
5. Repeat this progression 3-5 times.
6. If you experience any discomfort while performing this exercise please see one of staff.