

July 2008

## Recognizing and Treating a “Mini-stroke”



**N**o permanent damage results from a **transient ischemic attack (TIA)**, sometimes called a mini-stroke. It is caused by a short-term blockage of a blood vessel supplying blood and oxygen to the brain.

Although its effects—which can include trouble speaking, dizziness, blurred vision and weakness on one side of the body, among other signs—last less than 24 hours before

disappearing, **a TIA is a warning that a full-blown stroke could occur within days or months.** This happens in more than a third of people who experience TIAs.

To determine what caused the blockage, your physician will order tests, so treatments targeted to preventing future TIAs or strokes can begin. These might include drugs to manage high blood pressure and/or cholesterol, or surgery if the blockage occurred in the carotid artery.

Most crucial, never ignore the warning signs of stroke or TIA. Simply remember **FAST**:

- **Face: Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?**
- **Arms: Can the person raise both arms? Does one stay lower than the other?**
- **Speech: Can the person repeat a simple sentence without errors or slurring?**
- **Time: Call 911 immediately if any symptoms are present.**

After a TIA, we can help patients improve physical skills by creating exercises to improve balance and mobility, routines to increase muscle strength and strategies to improve the ability to transfer from one position to another. We can also suggest ways to incorporate various lifestyle changes, such as eating healthier and stopping smoking, which can reduce the risk of TIA and stroke.

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## Why Does Yoga Seem More Difficult?



**Y**ou used to enjoy yoga, but it seems more difficult as you grow older. If so, it may be a good time to reassess your practice in light of the realities of an aging body. Beginning in our 40s and 50s, our bodies gradually lose resilience. Muscle fibers contract, motor neurons decline in number and soft-tissue extensibility decreases. In short, we naturally become less able to flex, extend, bend and contort our bodies.

As for that difficult yoga, “difficult” compared to what? If you are returning to yoga after a long hiatus, do not use past performance to gauge your present ability. Your muscles may remember the asanas, but they will not go there as easily and should not be expected to.

If you have been practicing consistently and find that what bolstered you in the past seems not to work as well today, discuss your concerns with your yoga teacher, your physician and/or us. And if you have been practicing solo, resuming yoga classes may help you to make beneficial adjustments.

For one thing, consider Iyengar, a less vigorous yoga instruction that focuses on alignment and uses props to assist in stretching. Elements of safe yoga practice include

- **a qualified teacher;**
- **realistic expectations, based on age and health;**
- **a noncompetitive attitude;**
- **awareness of limitations and injury-prone areas;** and
- **patience with progress (and with healing, if you get hurt).**

There is plenty of evidence that, when approached mindfully and with realistic expectations, yoga offers many health benefits for people of all ages. Also, feel free to ask for other exercise alternatives if you desire a different exercise experience. The key remains getting regular exercise.

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## What's That “Snap, Crackle and Pop” in My Hip?



**Y**our hip joint is one of the sturdiest joints in your body, and while hip degeneration is a normal part of aging, overuse and irritation can cause the snapping or popping sound you hear when you walk or get up from a seated position. While the sensation is usually painless, over time and without proper treatment, it could lead to **bursitis**, a painful inflammation of the fluid-filled sac, or bursa, that helps bones and muscles move smoothly.

If the snapping bothers you, but not enough to visit the doctor, you can apply ice to your hip; take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) if your doctor agrees; and/or change your workout routine to avoid repetitive movement of the hip to prevent future complications.

If you still experience discomfort after trying these remedies, we can perform simple range-of-motion, gait, posture and stability tests on your hips, from which we can design a plan that may include

- **stretching and flexibility exercises so the muscle and tendon will glide more easily and not cause bursitis of the hip;**
- **exercises to strengthen muscles around the hip joint to help decrease the burden on the hip;**
- **massage therapy;**
- **heat and cold application;** and
- **ultrasound.**

Remember, pain and unusual sounds are your body's way of telling you something has changed. Consult us if you hear snapping or popping sounds and experience pain in your hip when walking or rising from a seated position. Importantly, an exercise routine may greatly assist you in maintaining your lifestyle.

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## Plantar Fasciitis—A Pain in the Foot



**M**ost heel pain is due to a condition called **plantar fasciitis**, inflammation and/or degeneration of the plantar fascia, a thick connective tissue running from the heel bone to the ball of the foot that helps maintain the arch of the foot and transmits your weight across the foot as you walk or run. Typically, symptoms are at their worst when you wake up in the morning. The following conditions can cause or aggravate plantar fasciitis:

- walking with an abnormal step;
- prolonged walking or standing;
- sports such as running or basketball;
- obesity;
- lack of arch support;
- inflexible Achilles tendons and calf muscles; and/or
- walking barefoot on hard surfaces.

Fortunately, most cases of plantar fasciitis respond to basic treatment options. Until your plantar fascia is healthy again, you may have to **rest your foot** by modifying the types of physical activities you perform. Pain may be treated with **icing and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs** (NSAIDs) such as aspirin, ibuprofen or naproxen, if your doctor approves. In some cases, your physician may prescribe **an oral or injectable corticosteroid**. **Orthotic shoe inserts, night splints** and **proper footwear** may help, too. When treatment is unsuccessful, **surgery** to release the tension of the plantar fascia ligament may be considered.

**Most importantly, an exercise regimen designed to strengthen and stretch the plantar fascia can bring long-term relief.** We can design a complete program to relieve the pain of plantar fasciitis, while strengthening your foot to help prevent recurrence of the problem.

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## Cholesterol-controlling Drugs and Muscle Soreness



**D**rugs known as **statins** are widely prescribed by physicians to treat high cholesterol. These life-saving medications—such as atorvastatin, simvastatin and pravastatin—are safe and effective for the vast majority of patients.

However, as with most drugs, statins are not without side effects, **muscle pain** being among the more common. About 9% of patients report muscle pain, but for most of

them, the discomfort is self-limiting and ends within a few weeks of starting the medication.

For a few patients, however, **muscle pain continuing or intensifying over time may signal a rare and potentially life-threatening side effect.** One condition, myopathy, causes muscle wasting and weakness. Of greater concern is a rare condition known as rhabdomyolysis, which causes a more severe breakdown of muscle. Waste products from such muscle deterioration can result in kidney damage.

If you are one of the large number of people taking statin medication to help lower your cholesterol, your doctor needs to monitor any muscular discomfort you experience to ensure that you are getting the maximum benefits with minimal risk. You can expect him or her to ask you about this regularly.

In addition, physical therapy, including the application of heat or cold packs, can provide symptomatic relief, and that may be all that is needed. You can also expect us to ask you about muscle soreness to monitor whether your pain is a response to exercise or a severe reaction to the drugs you are taking. Early investigation and treatment of muscular pain can nip potential long-term problems in the bud.