

Dr Gupta: Nine months ago, this would have been impossible. All her life, 39-year-old Susan Flanagan lived with back pain. As she got older, the pain grew worse, until one day...

Susan: I leaned over⁽¹⁾, I guess I put a pair of pants on or something... and I was like... oh, oh...

Dr Gupta: She was in agony, barely⁽²⁾ able to walk. A disk had herniated in her back. It progressed to a condition called sciatica.

Dr Andrew Casden: It's very common in 30, 40, 50-year age groups. The disk is like a cushion⁽³⁾, like a wet sponge⁽⁴⁾ between the vertebrae, the bones in the spine⁽⁵⁾. As we get older, this sponge dries out and it becomes less cushioning.

Dr Gupta: The disk slips⁽⁶⁾, pinching⁽⁷⁾ a nerve in the back.

Dr Casden: All of a sudden, that disk presses on the nerve, and their back pain disappears completely and now they get that intense horrible sciatic pain.

Dr Gupta: Pain that travels from the low back down the leg. For Susan, sciatica was prompted⁽⁸⁾ by an injury, but for most people usually in their 30s or 40s, the disk slips slowly brushing against the nerve only intermittently. At that point, it can be treated non surgically with over-the-counter⁽⁹⁾ pain relievers⁽¹⁰⁾, light stretching exercises, sometimes acupuncture.

Dr Casden: As people get older in their late 50s and then, in the 60s and 70s, they tend to get more arthritis in the spine, they may still get sciatica from the nerves being compressed by arthritic tissues.

Dr Gupta: Once that happens, an operation is often the only recourse⁽¹¹⁾. After exhausting⁽¹²⁾ all other treatment options, that's what Susan Flanagan did. Six weeks after operation she can walk, sometimes run.

Susan: I feel so much better, I mean I can do anything.

Dr Gupta: According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, to find relief⁽¹³⁾ from sciatica, try to find a position that's comfortable for you, but be active. Motion actually helps reduce inflammation, and for more information about sciatica, log on to the American Academy of Orthopaedic surgeons' website at www.orthoinfo.aaos.org.

CNN.

Lexical helpline:

1. **lean over (v):** move to a position that is inclined
2. **barely (adv):** to a very limited extent
3. **cushion (n):** something that protects from shock, a shock absorber
4. **sponge (n):** a lightweight porous absorbant piece
5. **the spine:** the vertebral column
6. **slip (v):** move from its proper position
7. **pinch (v):** painfully constrict or squeeze a part of the body
8. **prompt (v):** bring about, trigger
9. **over-the-counter (otc):** drugs sold without a prescription
10. **pain reliever:** analgesic
11. **recourse (n):** source of solution
12. **exhaust (v):** try out all possibilities
13. **relief (n):** factor that ends a feeling of pain