

Leg Pains Reducing While Walking Up-Hill!!

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Most of the pains in the thighs and legs increase while walking uphill or to a height. The commonest of these are pains of osteo-arthritis of the knees and root pains of disc disease (sciatica).

If a patient complains of pains in the legs on walking and is a heavy smoker or a diabetic, arterial claudication should be excluded by palpating vessels in the lower limbs. All such patients complain of increased pains while walking up-hill and the pain is less while walking downhill.

However, in the history taking if you elicit that the patient's pains in the legs reduce while walking up-hill and increase while walking down-hill, one should think of lumbar canal stenosis.

This condition is more common in older people where there is a combination of osteophytes, thickened ligamentum flavum

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and protruding disc narrowing the spinal canal. Many of these people have an increased lordosis with a protuberent abdomen. In fact, if they refuse surgery, loss of weight and physiotherapy to reduce lordosis gives them some improvement in these symptoms. In such patients flexion of the spine e.g. while sitting down, reduces the pain. This is what happens when the patient is walking uphill and the pain diminishes. Similarly, walking downhill increases lordosis and the pains in the legs increase. There are other points in the history which differentiate lumbar canal stenosis from prolapsed disc which is much more common.

The most important point in the history is that the symptoms of prolapsed disc have an acute onset. These patients also have resting pain. The root pain which is present is usually unilateral. The pain increases on walking and specially while walking up-hill.

The onset of symptoms in patients having lumbar canal stenosis is very gradual and occurs with increasing age.