

FORECAST STUDY

Newsletter 1

The FORECAST Study: Factors Predicting the transition from acute to persistent pain in people with sciatica

STUDY NEWSLETTER 01: 12/10/22

Study Update

A huge thank you to everyone who has taken part in the FORECAST study so far – working together we have a truly fantastic opportunity to better understand sciatica and ultimately improve care for people who are suffering.

Sciatica is a condition that affects the small nerves in the back, but people with sciatica feel pain or symptoms in their leg. Most patients with sciatica will improve over time (e.g., with treatment or spontaneously), but some will develop persistent pain. Currently, we cannot predict who will improve and who will continue to have persistent pain.

This study hopes to answer the following questions:

1. Are there differences in nerve function and structure in patients with sciatica?
2. Can we predict who will recover or who will continue to have persistent pain?

FORECAST aims to answer these questions by collecting very detailed information from people with early sciatica (through questionnaires, a detailed assessment, a skin biopsy, blood testing, and, for some participants, a specialist MRI to look at the health of the spinal nerves), and then following those people for a year through regular questionnaires to find out how their symptoms change over time.

Exciting Extensions to the study

This Autumn, FORECAST moves into an exciting new phase – the addition of lumbar spine MRI scanning to the existing study protocol will start soon, adding the chance to explore changes in the nerves coming from the lower back in more detail.

We have also added a 'Monthly Pain Diary' to the study to better capture changes in participants' symptoms over the year. Sciatica can sometimes come and go, or vary in severity over time and snapshots at three and twelve months might have missed this vital information. Making the questionnaires available online has also streamlined the study, making the questionnaires/surveys easier to complete and return.

Working on FORECAST
day-to-day



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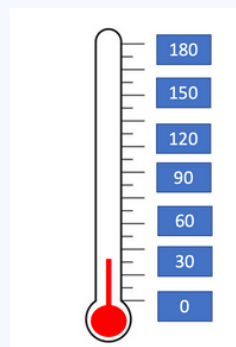
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Patient Partners

We are lucky to be working closely with Claire Robinson and Christine Price, both experts in lived experience of sciatica. Claire and Christine have been invaluable, test-running and informing the survey development for the next phase of the study and working with psychologists in the team to develop a new sciatica-specific questionnaire item to better capture the reality and challenge of living with sciatica. Look out for Claire and Christine's profiles at the end of this newsletter.

Recruitment update

Recruitment continues until Autumn 2023. Since our official study launch in May 2022 we have recruited around 30 participants. We will recruit another 150 over the next year bringing the total to 180.



Collaborators

The FORECAST study is supported and led by a host of scientists and other collaborators from very different backgrounds, each bringing unique expertise to the question of better understanding sciatica.

We will invite each of our collaborators to tell us more about themselves and their role in FORECAST over the following newsletters so keep an eye out for more information about our fantastic team.

What next?

As we move into the autumn, we are continuing recruitment in earnest – working closely with local health centres, musculoskeletal services, print media, and community sites to reach people all over the county who might be interested in taking part in the study.

We are aiming to recruit 180 participants with sciatica, and also healthy volunteers (the same gender and age as our participants). We are working hard to strengthen recruitment routes – keep an eye out for posters in your local area and please do let us know if you have ideas for places that we could put a poster or some flyers!

Results and findings

Analysis of the study findings will begin in earnest when all of the data has been collected – from 2024 onwards. That is a long time to wait, so interim analyses will be performed throughout the study, as and when we collect enough information. We will provide updates and information through these newsletters as the analyses and results start to come together.

Due to the broad and detailed information that participants are generously sharing with us there are opportunities to explore many fascinating angles into sciatica. We look forward to sharing new discoveries with you as the study goes on.

Meet Our Patient Partners



Claire Robinson

I am a patient partner on the Forecast Sciatica Study. I have lived experience of sciatica which lasted for more than 10 years, and which became chronic pain. My sciatica was likely caused by a disc bulge and after some time it probably healed but I was left with similar symptoms mimicked by my piriformis muscle. I overcame my sciatica by exploring a range of different things like posture, movement and exercise with little supported self management. I was left with pain flares which are emotionally driven and which I am having great success overcoming with the use of neuroplasticity. My role in the Forecast study is to use my own personal experience of sciatica and chronic pain to help shape the study so that the outcomes can be measured as accurately as possible. I really enjoy collaborating with everyone on the study, and it makes me feel very privileged to be a part of Forecast knowing that my input on the study could have a significant impact to people with sciatica.



Christine Price

I'm Christine and I am a patient partner for the Forecast study. I have lived with sciatica for the last fourteen years. As part of my sciatica, I experience neuropathic pain. My sciatica started very suddenly, following a manual handling injury, and I was in excruciating pain for many months. Walking, sitting down, standing still were all difficult for me, and to some extent remain difficult. Over the years I have experienced various sciatica treatments, including back surgery, epidurals, physiotherapy, and medications. My pain levels have gradually decreased over time, and I am able to live a near normal and full life. My skills in managing my pain have increased, as has my ability to live well with pain. My role in the Forecast study is to use my experience and insights about living with sciatica to help inform and guide the study, to help ensure in the future we can better support people who have sciatica to recover the best they can and as quickly as they can. I'm proud and privileged to be part of the amazing FORECAST team.