

Sciatica

What is it?

Sciatica refers to pain, weakness, numbness, or tingling in the leg. It is caused by injury to or pressure on the sciatic nerve. Sciatica is a symptom of another medical problem, not a medical condition on its own.

Causes

Sciatica occurs when there is pressure or damage to the sciatic nerve. This nerve starts in the lower spine and runs down the back of each leg. This nerve controls the muscles of the back of the knee and lower leg and provides sensation to the back of the thigh, part of the lower leg, and the sole of the foot.

Common causes of sciatica include:

Herniated disk (commonly referred to as Slipped disk)

Piriformis syndrome (a pain disorder involving the narrow muscle in the buttocks)

Pelvic injury or fracture

Tumors

Spinal stenosis

Symptoms

Sciatica pain can vary widely. It may feel like a mild tingling, dull ache, or a burning sensation. In some cases, the pain is severe enough to make a person unable to move.

The pain most often occurs on one side. Some people have sharp pain in one part of the leg or hip and numbness in other parts. The pain or numbness may also be felt on the back of the calf or on the sole of the foot. The affected leg may feel weak.

The pain often starts slowly. Sciatica pain may get worse:

After standing or sitting

At night

When sneezing, coughing, or laughing

When bending backwards or walking more than a few yards, especially if caused by spinal stenosis

Exams and Tests

The Chiropractor will perform a physical exam. This may show:

Weakness of knee bending or foot movement

Difficulty bending the foot inward or down

Abnormal or weak reflexes

Loss of sensation or numbness

Pain when lifting the leg straight up off the examining table

Tests determine on the suspected causes. They are often not needed unless pain is severe or long lasting. They may include:

X-rays
MRIs or other imaging tests

Chiropractic Care

When one or more vertebrae are out of alignment with the one above or below in the spine, we say that it is "subluxated". A subluxation causes pressure on the nerve that flows from the spinal cord out of the spine, and a pinched nerve is an irritated nerve, which doesn't transmit correctly the nerve impulses and information between the brain and the body. If you tread on a hosepipe this will produce a similar effect, your foot would stop the flow of water due to insufficient pressure.

It has been proved that a subluxation and its consequent pinching of the nerve causes a limited transmission of nerve impulses to the organs and tissues of the body and may be the cause of many diseases (dis-eases), including sciatica.

The Chiropractor will carry out a series of tests to determine your if there is nerve impingement, called vertebral subluxations, and after studying your case, will proceed to adjust your spine to return health and homeostasis to your body through the nervous system.

Self-Help

Apply ice to the painful area. Try ice for the first 48 - 72 hours.

Bed rest is not recommended. Reduce your activity for the first couple of days. Then, slowly start your usual activities after that.

Avoid heavy lifting or twisting of your back for the first 6 weeks after the pain begins.

You should start exercising again immediately with gentle exercises to strengthen your abdomen and improve flexibility of your spine. Ask your Chiropractor for an exercise programme.

Sleep on your back with a cushion below the knees to support the knees and rest the lumbar. You may also sleep on your side with a cushion between the knees to separate the pelvis and take pressure off the spine. Avoid sleeping face down to avoid pressure on the cervicals and therefore on the nervous system.

Visit your Chiropractor at least every 48 hours during the first week with the problem to ensure that there is no nerve interference. Your Chiropractor will advise you of the frequency of visits as you start to improve.

Alternative Names

Neuropathy - sciatic nerve; Sciatic nerve dysfunction

References

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