

What Is Sciatica?

Sciatica (pronounced sī-'a-ti-kə) describes persistent pain felt along the course of the sciatic nerve, which runs from the lower back, down through the buttock, and into the lower leg. The sciatic nerve is the longest and widest nerve in the body. It controls the muscles of the lower legs and provides sensation to the thighs, legs, and feet.

Although sciatica is relatively common, the true meaning of the term is often misunderstood. Sciatica is actually a term that describes a set of symptoms—not a diagnosis. Sciatica can be the result of multiple underlying conditions.

Sciatica occurs most frequently in people aged 30 to 50. Most often, it develops as a result of general wear and tear on the structures of the lower spine, not as a result of injury.

Symptoms

The most common symptom associated with sciatica is pain that radiates along the path of the sciatic nerve, from the lower back and down one leg; however, symptoms can vary widely depending on where the sciatic nerve is affected. Some may experience a mild tingling, a dull ache, or even a burning sensation, typically in one leg or foot. Muscle weakness may also be present in the affected leg or foot.

Pain from sciatica often begins slowly, gradually intensifying over time. In addition, the pain can worsen after sneezing, coughing, bending, other sudden movements, or prolonged sitting.

Diagnosis

Your chiropractor will begin by taking a complete patient history. You'll be asked to describe your pain, explain when it began, and indicate what activities lessen or intensify it. Forming a diagnosis will also require an exam, in which the doctor will pay special attention to your spine and legs. You may be asked to perform some basic activities that will test your sensory and muscle strength, as well as your reflexes. For example, you may be asked to lie on an examination table and lift your legs straight in the air, one at a time.

In some cases, your chiropractor may order diagnostic imaging, such as x-ray, MRI or CT scan. Diagnostic imaging may be used to rule out a more serious condition, such as a tumor or infection, and can be used when patients with severe symptoms fail to respond to six to eight weeks of conservative treatment.

Treatment Options

For most people, sciatica responds very well to conservative care, including chiropractic. Keeping in mind that sciatica is a symptom and not a stand-alone medical condition, treatment plans will often vary depending on the underlying cause of the problem.

Chiropractic offers a noninvasive (nonsurgical), drug-free treatment option. The goal of chiropractic care is to restore spinal movement, thereby improving function while decreasing pain and inflammation. Depending on the cause of the sciatica, a chiropractic treatment plan may cover several different treatment methods, including but not limited to spinal adjustments, ice/heat therapy, ultrasound, TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation), traction, and rehabilitative exercises.

Prevention

Consider these suggestions to help protect your back and improve your spinal health:

- Maintain a healthy diet and weight.
- Exercise regularly.
- Maintain proper posture.
- Avoid prolonged inactivity or bed rest.
- If you smoke, seek help to quit.
- Use good body mechanics when lifting.

If you or someone you know is suffering from sciatica, please call our office. We may be able to help.

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For more information, visit www.renzechiro.com or call the office at 965-3844.*