

Sciatica

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The term sciatica refers to pain, which radiates along the course of the sciatic nerve. This pain is generally experienced along the back portion of the leg often extending to the foot. Sciatica remains one of the most common forms of pain occurring as a result of low back spinal nerve root compromise. The sciatic pain intensity is often worse than the associated back pain. Sciatica is essentially a symptom of compressive neuropathy involving one or several nerves involving the lower back and sacral region. The sciatic nerve is essentially a collection of smaller nerve fibers in a collective group resembling a cable. The sciatic nerve traverses through the pelvic region, through the buttock and down into the leg. Its nerve fibers extend all the way down to the toes, representing the longest nerve fibers in the body.

The direct sciatic nerve compromise can result due to a direct blow or trauma to the nerve. Some susceptible individuals of sciatic nerve can be compressed as it crosses the piriformis muscle within the hip or gluteal region.

Sciatica is actually a symptom rather than a diagnosis. The sciatica can occur as a result of a number of different conditions with the most common being compromise of one of the contributing nerve roots in the spine. The sciatic nerve represents the largest single peripheral nerve in the body. It contains nerve fibers from multiple spinal levels extending from including the L4, L5, S1, S2, and S3 nerves. The sciatic nerve extends from the lower spine and traverses through deep buttock muscles extending all the way through the leg down to the foot. Sciatica can occur on the contributing lower back or sacral nerves compressed and/or inflamed. Sciatic pain may be accompanied by the presence of intermittent or persistent numbness, tingling, burning, or pricking type sensation. Degenerative disc disease (DDD) can contribute to the onset of sciatica due to the loss of vertical disc height and narrowing of the openings where the L4 and L5 nerve roots exit.

Most cases of sciatica will respond to time and/or a course of conservative care. If there is associated weakness, this suggests more severe neurological involvement. If there is impaired bowel or bladder control or progressive weakness, the presence of sciatica could represent a severe problem. This would require immediate medical attention. The sciatic nerve supplies sensation as well as muscle control and strength to the leg. It essentially connects the spinal cord with multiple muscles of the upper and lower leg as well as the foot.

The term sciatica is often over used and delightfully misunderstood. Many individuals and some doctors try to treat the sciatic pain directly and not realizing that the most common etiology arises or the most common cause arises from the low back. Sciatic is a symptom and not a diagnosis. The pain and symptoms experienced for the sciatic would be vastly different between different patients. The degree of sciatica is dependent on the severity of the cause as well as the patient's threshold for pain. Sciatica is usually not associated with permanent neurological damage although on rare cases serious problems and consequences can occur.

These consequences are more likely to occur when there is failure to adequately diagnose and treat the underlying causes on a timely basis. When the sciatica is felt in the leg, the most common cause is a problem in the low back. The causes of sciatica are not genetic in nature and it is typically the result of an acquired abnormality or age-related change involving the lower back. Pain and joint of her lower extremity does not represent true sciatica. Sciatica refers to characteristic signs and symptoms consistent with neurological involvement.