

Title: Sciatica

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Abstract: Low-back pain is a very common complaint encountered in the primary care setting. It is not unusual for patient's to report pain or numbness and tingling, known as sciatica, in one leg that accompanies back pain. Only a small percentage of these are due to compression or irritation of the sciatic nerve by a lumbar disc prolapse (bulging of the cushion between the vertebrae of the spine); however, this is the most common cause of sciatica. Surgery is a necessity for a small minority of sciatica cases. Most resolve by conservative management; however, surgery may provide faster relief in acute sciatica cases and for those cases that have not resolved initially with conservative management. At this time there is no long-term data showing a surgery to be superior to conservative management.

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# SCIATICA

## Reference

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sciatica&oldid=285386236>

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## **Background**

Nerves are located throughout the body and are like telephone wires that send information between the brain and the rest of the body. They allow the brain to tell our muscles to work so that we can move and they also send messages back to the brain from all parts of our body about things such as touch, pain, and temperature.

## **What Is Sciatica?**

Sciatica refers to symptoms felt when the sciatic nerve is irritated or being compressed. The sciatic nerve is a large nerve that runs from the lower back by the spine, down the buttock and leg and into the foot. Each leg has its own sciatic nerve. This nerve gives sensation to a large portion of the skin of the leg as well as allowing some of the muscles in the thigh, leg, and foot to work.

## **Signs & Symptoms**

The signs and symptoms of sciatica are usually limited to one side of the body and are located in the lower back, buttock, and/or certain parts of the foot and leg.

The signs and symptoms can include any or all of the following:

- Pain
- Numbness
- Pins and Needles sensation
- Muscle weakness
- Difficulty with moving or controlling the leg

## **Causes**

There are multiple things that can cause sciatica. The most common cause is a disc herniation. This occurs when one of the discs (which acts like a cushion between the bones of the spine) pushes on the sciatic nerve. Some of the other causes are:

- Spinal stenosis – the spinal canal (where the spinal cord is located) becomes too narrow and causes the sciatic nerve to be pinched
- Piriformis Syndrome – a muscle (known as the piriformis muscle) through which the sciatic nerve runs in the buttock spasms and pinches the sciatic nerve
- Late Pregnancy – the uterus can push on the sciatic nerve

## **Diagnosis**

Your doctor will be able to determine if you are experiencing sciatica. To deter-

mine the cause, a good history and physical exam by your doctor is needed. Also, the doctor may order an imaging test like an MRI to look at the spine and/or nerves to help with determining the cause.

## **Treatment**

Most cases (about 90%) of sciatica will go away with non-surgical treatments such as anti-inflammatory medications, exercises and physical therapy. If non-surgical treatment has not helped to improve symptoms after about 6 weeks or symptoms have continued to worsen, your doctor will need to determine if surgery is necessary. In certain cases where a disc herniation is the cause of the sciatica, surgery may provide faster symptom relief compared to non-surgical treatments. However, good long-term evidence showing a benefit of surgery over non-surgical treatments is lacking at this time. There are a small number of cases involving significant problems such as worsening muscle weakness or sensory deficits that require immediate surgery. See your doctor to determine the best treatment for you.