

Sciatica

SCIATIC NERVE

The sciatic nerve is the longest and largest nerve in the body. It's made up of five nerves that leave the spinal cord from the lower (lumbar) column, join in the pelvic area and then travel down the leg. As it travels down the leg it divides into many smaller nerves that reach the muscles and joints of the thigh, knee, calf, ankle, foot and toes.

WHAT IS SCIATICA?

When the sciatic nerve is inflamed, the condition is called sciatica. Not all leg pain is sciatica, but most all sciatica involves leg pain. When is leg pain sciatica? When you have sciatica pain, it is usually sharp or burning pain that starts in the buttock and as it progressively gets worse it will travel down the leg and sometimes even goes into the foot. Not all sciatica pain starts in the buttock, but no matter what causes the pain, you should have the chiropractor look at you to see if there is a low back problem or a muscular problem.

Sciatica sufferers often have severe pain along the sciatic nerve path, usually in the back of the legs and thighs, sometimes, to the ankle, foot and toes. There's not only searing, sharp pain but also parasthesia—strange nerve experiences such as pins and needles, burning tingling, prickling, crawling sensations or tenderness—that may be felt. Ironically, along with all the pain and nerve sensations the leg might feel numb!

To complicate matters, the location of sciatica pain may vary, although it's usually in the back of the legs or thighs, in some individuals the pain is in the front or side of the legs. Sometimes the pain is in the hips. For some of the sufferers, the pain is in both legs: bilateral sciatica.

BACK PAIN AND SCIATICA

Backache or hip problems may occur long before the sciatica symptoms show up, however, that isn't always the case. Sometimes sciatica is preceded by lower back or hip symptoms and sometimes it isn't.

THE PAIN VARIES

The quality of the pain may vary as well. There may be constant throbbing but then it may let up for hours or even days. The intensity may also vary. It may ache, or be knife-like. Sometimes postural changes, like lying down or changing positions, affect the pain and sometimes they don't. In that way, sciatica is like a toothache or earache. It's always there no matter what you do. In severe cases, sciatica can cause a loss of reflexes or even a wasting of the calf muscles.

For sciatica sufferers, a good night's sleep may be a thing of the past. Simple things like walking, bending, turning, sitting or standing up can be difficult or impossible.

CAUSES OF SCIATICA

Like most other conditions, sciatica has a wide variety of causes. Unlike most other conditions, however, this health problem's relationship to the spinal column is often very obvious. A misaligned spine, a protruded or ruptured disc can irritate the sciatic nerve, which may result in sciatica.

Sciatica has also been related to various non-spinal conditions. Advanced diabetes can cause neuritis or inflammation of the sciatic nerve, arthritis of the spine can irritate the sciatic nerve, constipation, tumors and even vitamin deficiencies have been linked to sciatica.

Physical trauma has been related to sciatica. Cases of sciatica have been reported following accidents, injuries and even childbirth, usually due to spinal misalignment.

THE MEDICAL APPROACH

The medical approach to sciatica pain is to treat the symptoms using painkillers, muscle relaxers and various orthopedic treatments which may include traction, physical therapy and other therapeutic measures. Sciatica is particularly frustrating to the medical doctor because in many cases even strong painkilling drugs bring little or no relief. However, relief may be obtained from injections of painkillers directly into the nerve roots. Drug dependency, however, may develop among some patients.

If the pain is not relieved, orthopedic and neuro-surgery may be resorted to as alternative treatments.

THE CHIROPRACTIC APPROACH

Chiropractors correct poor spinal alignment using spinal adjustments to relieve pressure from the spinal nerves, joints and discs, to balance posture and to permit the body to work without nerve interference.

Throughout our lives, we have our teeth checked, blood pressure checked and eyes checked but do we ever have our spines checked? We should because if the spine becomes misaligned or distorted it could damage (impinge) the nerves it is designed to protect. The impinged (some say pinched) nerves can upset the delicate workings of the nervous system, weaken the body and set the stage for disease, pain and body malfunction.

Just as we get our car's alignment checked and corrected, so we should get our spine's alignment checked out and corrected.

If you have a misaligned spine, then sciatica could result. Chiropractors correct that misalignment and relieve the pressure on the nerves that could be causing the sciatica pain.

TOO MANY WAIT

Chiropractic care appears to have the most effect on sciatica when used first. Unfortunately, many people first submit to medical care. Even after the medical treatment, and there is no results, chiropractic treatment can help the majority of sciatica sufferers. The longer you have a misaligned spine, the more damage you can have on the nerves and it is harder to reach a 100% healthy level and it takes longer to reach the highest level of health.

CONCLUSION

Those suffering from sciatica and leg pains would do well to visit a doctor of chiropractic. To many millions of sufferers, its unique approach to wellness has been a blessing.

Rather than an approach to “get rid of the pain,” doctors of chiropractic use the approach to “get rid of the problem.”

Indeed, rather than sit passively for conditions to crop up in our lives, before we address our health, the chiropractic approach is active, working to strengthen the person now, so that conditions will not “suddenly” crop up to plague us later on!