

SCIATICA

AN OVERVIEW

Compiled by

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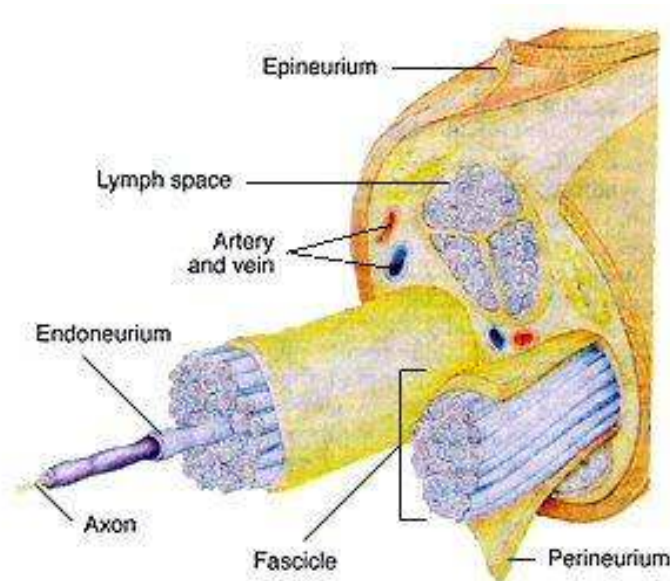
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Introduction

Sciatica is a pain that runs along the sciatic nerve, a large nerve extending from the lower back and down the back of each leg. Sciatica is a common kind of back pain.

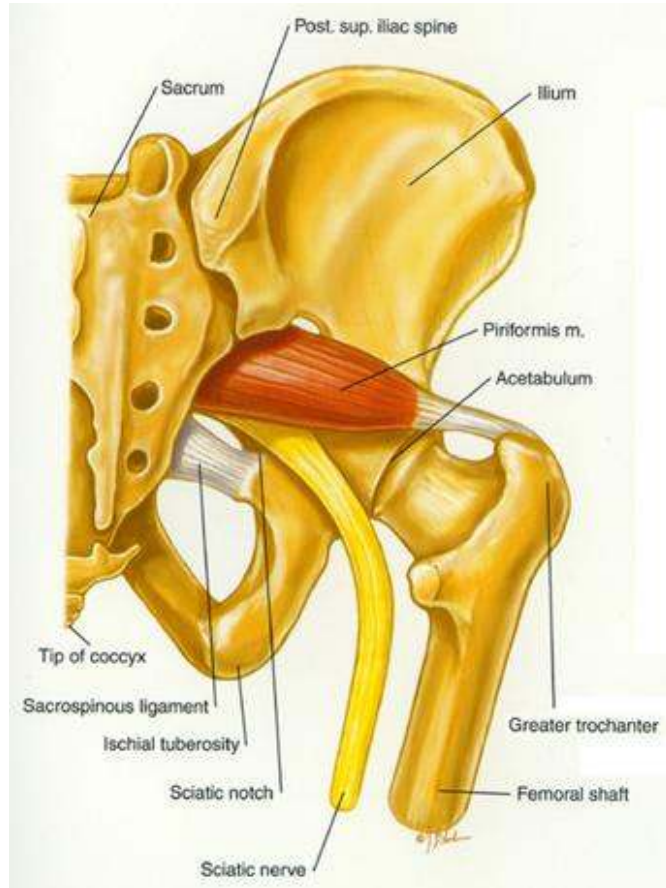


(Picture above - Cross Section of a Nerve)

Although sciatica can be very painful, it is rare for the disorder to cause permanent nerve damage. Most sciatica pain syndromes result from inflammation and will usually get better within a few weeks.

What are the symptoms of sciatica?

- Pain in the rear or leg that is worse when sitting
- Burning or tingling down the leg
- Weakness, numbness or difficulty moving the leg or foot
- A constant pain on one side of the rear
- A shooting pain that makes it difficult to stand up



(Picture right - The sciatic nerve is the longest nerve in the body. It runs from the lower back through the hips and buttocks and down each leg, where it divides into the tibial and peroneal nerves)

Sciatica usually affects only one side of the lower body. Often, the pain extends from the lower back all the way through the back of the thigh and down through the leg. Depending on where the sciatic nerve is affected, the pain may also extend to the foot or toes. For some individuals, the pain from sciatica can be severe and debilitating. For others, the pain from sciatica might be infrequent and irritating, but has the potential to get worse.

What causes sciatica?

Any condition that causes irritation to the sciatic nerve can cause the pain associated with sciatica. In many cases, sciatica is caused by pressure on the sciatic nerve from a herniated disc (also called a slipped disc or ruptured disc).

(Picture right - Dissection revealing Sciatic Nerve)

Additional common causes of sciatica include:

- lumbar spinal stenosis (narrowing of spinal canal in the lower back)
- degenerative disc disease (breakdown of discs, which act as cushions between the vertebrae)



- spondylolisthesis (a condition in which one vertebra slips forward over another one)
- pregnancy

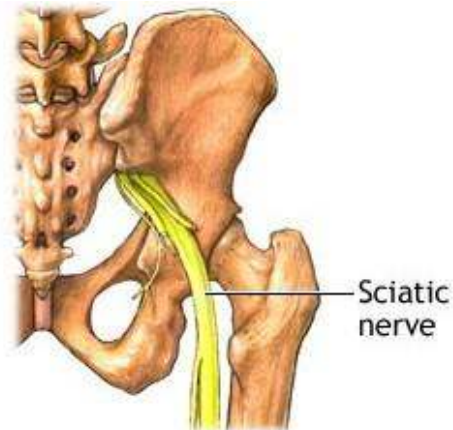
Other things that may make the back pain worse include being overweight, not exercising regularly, wearing high heels, or sleeping on a mattress that is too soft.

How is sciatica diagnosed?

In diagnosing sciatica, a therapist will take a medical history and perform an examination of the back, hips, and legs in order to test for strength, flexibility, sensation, and reflexes.

Other tests may include:

- X-rays
- MRI scans
- CT scans
- Nerve conduction studies –In these tests, an electrical current is passed through a nerve to determine the health or disease of that nerve.



Pain from sciatica radiates from the buttock down the leg and can travel as far as the feet and toes

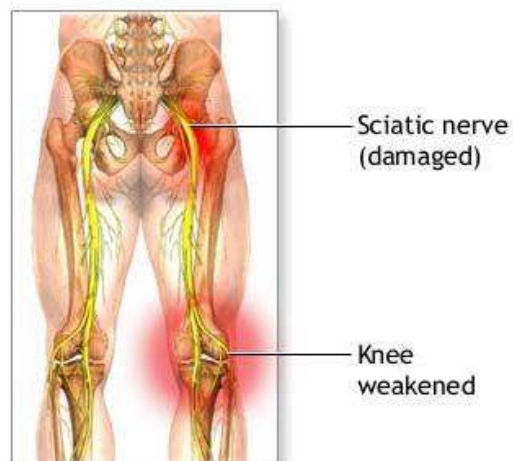
How is sciatica treated?

Treatment for sciatica focuses on relieving pressure and inflammation. Typical sciatica treatments include:

- Medical treatments for sciatica (such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen, oral steroids, or epidural steroid injections) help to relieve inflammation.

(Picture right - Sciatic Nerve Damage causing Weakened Knee)

- Epidural steroid injections where steroids, with their strong anti-inflammatory effects, are delivered at the origin of the inflamed sciatic nerve roots.
- Physical therapy usually starts after adequate pain control and has an essential role both for the acute episode as well as long term avoidance of further episodes.
- Surgery for sciatica may be warranted if the sciatic nerve pain is severe and has not been relieved with appropriate manual or medical treatments, patients should seek immediate medical attention with any symptoms of progressive lower extremity weakness, loss of bladder or bowel control.



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