

Sciatica

(Also known as Sciatic Pain, Pinched Sciatic Nerve, Acute Nerve Root Compression)

What is sciatica?

Sciatica is the term given to symptoms experienced from compression or irritation of the sciatic nerve (figure 1). Symptoms usually include one-sided low back pain which radiates into the buttock and / or leg and sometimes includes muscle spasm, pins and needles, numbness or weakness. Symptoms may also be experienced in the foot or toes. Although symptoms typically affect only one side of the body, occasionally both sides may be affected.

Whilst sciatica is a common complaint, the term itself is often misunderstood. It is important to realize that sciatica is not a diagnosis, but rather a description of symptoms. There are a number of conditions which can cause compression or irritation to the sciatic nerve resulting in sciatic pain. This is important to understand as treatment for each of these conditions differs.

Causes of sciatica

One of the most common causes of this condition is a lumbar disc bulge. Lumbar disc bulges frequently occur due to excessive sitting, bending or lifting activities and may occur traumatically or due to repetitive or prolonged forces. In the older patient, sciatic pain may be associated with bony compression of the nerve root caused by spinal degeneration or spinal canal stenosis. These conditions typically occur due to gradual wear and tear over long periods of time and are frequently associated with overuse.

Some of the more common conditions which may cause sciatic pain include:

- Lumbar Disc Bulge
- Soft tissue inflammation
- Spinal Degeneration
- Spinal Canal Stenosis
- Spondylolisthesis
- Piriformis Syndrome
- Sacroiliac Joint Dysfunction

Other less common conditions which may also cause sciatic pain include:

- tumors
- bony growths
- infections
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Diagnosis of sciatica

A thorough subjective and objective examination from a physiotherapist is usually sufficient to diagnose sciatica and the underlying cause. Investigations such as an X-ray, MRI or CT scan may be required to confirm diagnosis.

Treatment for sciatica

Treatment for this condition varies greatly depending on the cause of symptoms. Accurate diagnosis from a physiotherapist or doctor is therefore required to determine the most appropriate treatment. Treatment of the underlying cause of symptoms should result in a reduction in sciatic symptoms **Physiotherapy for T4 syndrome**

Physiotherapy for sciatica can hasten the healing process, ensure an optimal outcome, and reduce the likelihood of future recurrence. Treatment may involve:

- mobilization
- manipulation
- Acupuncture
- electrotherapy (e.g. ultrasound)
- postural taping or bracing
- dry needling
- education
- activity modification advice
- ergonomic advice
- the use of a lumbar support for sitting
- exercises to improve flexibility, strength, posture and core stability
- Nerve root stretches

If you need help with your sciatica, please contact me on +442866328200 or email info@lindaburke.co.uk