



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

Sciatica

The sciatic nerves are the largest nerves in the body, about as big as your finger. They start in the lower region of the spine, go down the buttock and back of the leg to the end of your foot. Pain from this nerve is often called sciatica and can be felt anywhere from the back of the hip to the toes.

One most often suffers from sciatica, also referred to as lumbar radiculopathy, when they are middle-aged. Sciatica can occur from normal wear and tear, when the nerve is pinched between vertebrae or disk (cushion between vertebrae), a narrowing in the passageways by arthritis or swelling of a sprained ligament in the area. It becomes irritated and tender. At times, no exact cause is found, but a movement that is normally harmless (such as bending over) suddenly brings on violent pain.

Patients will complain of numbness, tingling, or pins and needles anywhere along the path of the sciatic nerves. Surgery is rarely needed unless it is a herniated disk that must be removed. Sciatica often improves with conservative management. Treatment usually consists of time, rest and anti-inflammatory medicine such as aspirin or ibuprofen. Heat and ice will also help relax the affected muscles. After a few days of rest, stretches can relieve some of the tension and help you return to your normal activities. Also, a short course of physical therapy may assist in relieving your symptoms.

If after approximately 3 months conservative methods are not improving the condition, an individual might need surgery. As mentioned earlier, if there is a herniated disk pressing on the nerve root, then it will have to be removed. This surgery is highly successful at around 90%. After surgery, you should avoid uncomfortable positions and driving for about a month. Then therapy and conservative management will return you to full activities.

Highlights for Sciatica

1. Largest nerve in the body about as big as your finger
2. Extends from the lower spine all the way to the toes
3. Pain, numbness and tingling will follow this path
4. Surgery is rarely needed, unless the cause is a herniated disk

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