

Health Notes

Suffering Sciatica!

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Sciatica is a common condition treated in our office. It is a condition that is not clearly understood by most of its sufferers. All they know is that it can be the most unrelenting pain they have ever had.

Sciatica is the term given to pain coming from the sciatic nerve, nothing more, and nothing less. The sciatic nerve root originates at the base of the spine. The trunk of the sciatic nerve travels down the buttocks, down the back of the thigh and splits into two large branches at the knee. One of these branches continues down the back of the calf to the bottom of the foot, whereas the other branch runs down the front of the shin to the top of the foot. Besides these two large branches there are numerous smaller branches that shoot off along the course of the nerve. This is a large, powerful nerve supplying many of the muscles of the pelvis, legs and feet. I still recall my anatomy dissection days when we first exposed the sciatic nerve. The size of this nerve is about the size of an index finger... no wonder it can cause such intense pain.

This condition can be the result of a number of causes. Muscle spasms, spinal and pelvic misalignments and disc conditions are a few of the more common causes of sciatica. Along the course of the sciatic nerve, it travels through and alongside many different muscles. Spasms of any of these muscles can put pressure on this nerve, which produces pain. This situation is most commonly seen in the low back and buttock area, but can occur elsewhere along the nerve's path.

Spinal and pelvic misalignments can also produce sciatica. A misalignment at either the spinal levels of the nerve's origin or the pelvic area can produce a localized insult to the sciatic nerve resulting in pressure on the nerve which in turn causes painful sciatica.

Disc conditions are usually the most serious causes of sciatica. Though not always true, sciatica traveling below the knee is considered by many to be indicative of a disc condition. When a disc is injured it becomes inflamed. With inflammation comes swelling. The swelling puts pressure on the sciatic nerve root resulting in pain. Sciatica that is the result of a disc condition usually takes longer to resolve than from other causes.

The diagnosis of sciatica starts with a physical exam of the low back. A careful methodical approach will put your doctor on the right track as to the next step. Specific results from this

exam may lead your doctor to choose additional diagnostic tests, such as x-rays, CT scans, MRI, or nerve conduction test. The existence of sciatica alone does not dictate additional testing; in fact, in the absence of trauma, most insurance companies will not authorize testing beyond x-rays without a period of conservative care. Exams and testing results will allow your doctor to dictate a treatment program designed to address the cause of the sciatica.

Once an accurate diagnosis is made, the appropriate treatment can begin. The medical community may prescribe anti-inflammatories or muscle relaxers and even physical therapy. Chiropractors utilize chiropractic manipulation, which may be of the non-force type as well as traditional methods. Many chiropractors, as we do, include therapy techniques similar to physical therapy as part of their treatment of sciatica. Therapeutic stretching, ice, heat, and, at times, vitamins may also be added to the treatment regimen.

Under proper care sciatica is usually treated effectively. However, this is a condition that responds best when treatment is sought and delivered early in its onset. Ignoring sciatica and delaying treatment makes this condition resistant to resolution. *Don't wait!* 🌟

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