

Sciatica



SYMPTOMS: The sciatic nerves are the largest nerve in the body. Pain can travel anywhere from the middle of the low back into the buttocks, down the back of the leg, and even to the ankle. Pain may be present only in the buttocks. The pain may seem like a deep dull ache, and/or soreness in the back of the buttock. At times, it may be sharp and severe. It may be severe enough that one cannot even stand up straight. Simple tasks such as putting your socks on in the morning seem monumental. Sleep may be disturbed. Pain increases when arising from a seated position making it very difficult or even impossible to straighten up. Leg pain may be present with or without back pain.

Other symptoms may be present.

CAUSES: Injury to the sciatic nerve occurs when the nerve is twisted, stretched or compressed. One of the most common causes for sciatic pain is mis-alignment of the vertebrae in the low back. When vertebrae in the low back become mis-aligned, irritation and inflammation of the surrounding soft tissue can occur involving the sciatic nerve. Disc herniations can also irritate the sciatic nerve as fluid and chemicals within the disc leak out into the spinal canal causing an inflammatory response in the body. Other causes for sciatic nerve irritation include mis-alignment in the joints that make up the pelvis, arthritis in the vertebra of the low back, over-exertion of the muscles in the low back, obesity and trauma. Other causes may exist.

TREATMENT: Conservative treatment of sciatica utilizing chiropractic adjustments is highly effective in reducing sciatic nerve inflammation and pain. Taking over the counter medications simply mask the pain without actually resolving the structural problem, joint mis-alignment. In fact, taking medications may actually make the overall problem worse, by masking your body's natural defense mechanism. Your body is sending pain signals to your brain in order to prevent you from moving certain ways that could potentially further injure the back. If that defense mechanism is eliminated through the use of pain pills, further insult to the body is much more likely.

After performing a thorough history and physical exam, your chiropractor will determine if you have "true sciatica" or something else. Once you are told that the sciatic nerve is involved, the chiropractor will begin the use of conservative chiropractic adjustments to restore structure and function to the spine. Treatment may also include adjunctive therapies such as ice and electrical stimulation. Home care might include an aggressive home icing program, stretching and possibly bracing. Modification of certain activities while at home may be recommended, such as avoiding prolonged sitting. If deemed medically necessary, x-rays will be ordered. If significant progress is not made within four weeks or so, your chiropractor may order advanced imaging such as CAT scan or MRI. A referral to another specialist such as a neurologist or neurosurgeon may be warranted in some instances. In the majority of cases, studies show that conservative care has been shown to return people to work sooner and eliminate pain faster than other alternative forms of care.