

Sciatica common annoyance

Nearly everyone has experienced it to a degree. People blame their limp, poor posture and grouchiness on it. People talk about it and describe it as if they were experts on it. What is "it?"

Sciatica.

Sciatica is a relatively common disorder caused by pressure on a nerve which causes pain in the back of the thigh, buttock and hip area. Sciatica is appropriately named due to the involvement of the sciatic nerve, which begins in the lower back and runs down the back part of the thighs and legs.

The nerve begins as a thick collection of fibers from the lumbar portion of the spinal cord. Fibers from five segments unite to form a nerve about the diameter of your index finger. Shortly after joining, the nerve passes through a muscle called the piriformis, located deep within the back of the hip.

The nerve then course down the back of the thigh, sending signals to the hamstring muscle group. At the back of the knee the nerve splits into two separate nerves to supply the muscle of the calf, lower leg and foot. Besides sending signals to muscles, the sciatic nerve also supplies sensory nerves to the skin.

Pressure on the sciatic nerve can produce pain, numbness, tingling or weakness anywhere the nerve travels. The pressure can be from a bulging disc in the lower back area or more commonly, from pressure due to the tightness in the muscles of the hip and thigh.

Pain can be felt in the lower back, hip area, back of the upper thigh or anywhere the nerve runs. Mild cases produce a dull ache in the lower back or the back of the thigh. This usually subsides with rest. More involved cases produce increased discomfort in the leg, possibly tingling and numbness and increased disability. Rest may or may not ease pain. Sciatica of this nature needs to be checked out by the doctor.

Performing low back, hip and leg flexibility exercises and proper posture and lifting techniques can eliminate or reduce your risk for developing sciatica. Treatment of sciatica is aimed at easing pressure and inflammation. Rest from painful activities, anti-inflammatories and gentle stretching exercises can ease most cases.

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