



AdvaCare Clinics: Sciatica Pain & Symptom Relief

Sciatica is a set of symptoms including pain that may be caused by general compression or irritation of one of five spinal nerve roots that give rise to each sciatic nerve, or by compression or irritation of the left or right or both sciatic nerves.

Nerve compression may arise from a bulging spinal disk, herniated inter-vertebral disc in the spine, and deterioration and misalignment of the vertebrae. The vertebrae are separated by cushions called discs, and have small “facet” joints between them. The discs and joints allow the spine to move and be flexible.

The pain is felt in the lower back, buttock, or various parts of the leg and foot. In addition to pain, which is sometimes severe, there may be numbness, muscular weakness, pins and needles or tingling and difficulty in moving or controlling the leg. Typically, the symptoms are only felt on one side of the body, although sometimes symptoms are perceived on both sides.

This can cause tremendous pain and normal daily activities become difficult, if not impossible. Movement, sitting, coughing or sneezing can be excruciating. Sometimes the symptoms of sciatica are aggravated by walking or bending at the waist and relieved by lying down.

The sciatic nerve is the longest and widest single nerve in the human body and begins from nerve roots in the lumbar spinal cord in the low back and extends through the buttock area to send nerve endings down the lower limb.

Common causes of sciatica include the following lower back and hip conditions:

- Spinal disc herniation
- Degenerative disc disease
- Lumbar spinal stenosis
- Spondylolisthesis
- Piriformis syndrome

Sciatica may also be experienced in pregnancy, primarily due to the enlarged uterus pressing on the sciatic nerve. While most cases do not directly harm the fetus or the mother, indirect harm may come from the numbing effect on the legs which can cause loss of balance and falling.

Sciatica can also be caused by tumors impinging on the spinal cord or the nerve roots. Severe back pain extending to the hips and feet, loss of bladder or bowel control, or

muscle weakness, may result from spinal tumors or cauda equina syndrome. Trauma to the spine, such as from a car accident, may also lead to sciatica.

It is important to note that sciatica is not a disease, but a term used to describe the symptoms. This point is important, because treatment for sciatica or sciatic symptoms often differs, depending upon the underlying cause of the symptoms and pain levels. Sciatica is also referred to as Lumbar Radiculopathy, which involves compression of the sciatic nerve roots caused by a herniated (torn) or protruding disc in the lower back.

Sciatica Treatments

As with other conditions, conservative treatments are tried first. Treatment modalities for sciatica might include:

- Initially, treatment of sciatica focuses on lowering the inflammation that is causing symptoms. This may include taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and muscle relaxers, and resting. In some cases, your doctor may prescribe oral steroids, which have more severe side effects but are proven effective in treating more stubborn cases of inflammation.
- Epidural Steroid Injections (ESI) – These injections deliver a long-lasting steroid and a local anesthetic into the epidural space, targeting the irritated nerve root.
- Transcutaneous Electrical Stimulation (TENS) – This passive process decreases the perception of acute and chronic pain and is not associated with side effects.
- Trigger Point Injections (TPIs) – These are used to calm muscle spasms.
- Deep Tissue Massage – Focal rubbing of tender areas may help relieve muscle spasms or contractions and improve the discomfort associated with sciatica. Massage can also promote relaxation, decreasing stress and tension.
- Spinal manipulation (Chiropractic treatment) – Some sciatica patients may derive benefit from spinal manipulation. A study comparing the clinical efficacy of spinal manipulation against microdiscectomy in patients with sciatica secondary to lumbar disk herniation found 60% of patients with sciatica who had failed other medical management benefited from spinal manipulation to the same degree as if they underwent surgical intervention.

When the initial pain of sciatica subsides, exercises and physical therapy may be part of your treatment program. Application of heat and cold may soothe the affected area.

Physical therapy – Physical Therapy helps improve symptoms of sciatica by increasing flexibility, range of motion, posture, and improving muscle strength. In fact, current evidence shows that an active exercise program promotes early recovery in sciatica patients.

Exercise – Exercise improves the pain of sciatica by increasing flexibility and range of motion. Another benefit is the releases hormones called “endorphins,” which are your body’s natural pain relievers.

At AdvaCare Clinic, we will work with you to design a customized treatment plan that restores your health as quickly, efficiently and as no