

# Sciatica *Understanding the symptoms*

By Brian Beise

## EXPERT ADVICE

### Causes

“Sciatica pain can be experienced by almost all age groups, from teens to older adults. In the early years, it normally results from a herniated disk and nerve impingement. For older adults, the most common causes are spinal stenosis or wear and tear that results in bone spur formations, thickened ligaments, and cyst formations.”



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### What is sciatica?

Often misconstrued as a diagnosis all its own, sciatica is actually a set of symptoms that results from another medical condition. Sciatica symptoms include: back pain, numbness, weakness, and tingling in the leg.

The sciatic nerve, the thickest nerve in the body, is made up of several smaller nerves. Any pinching or compression of this nerve can cause pain that shoots along its pathway, which extends all the way to the toes. Sciatica typically affects only one side of the body; pain radiates along the sciatic nerve from the lower back to the buttocks and down through each leg.

### What causes it?

Common causes of sciatica include acute injuries, herniated disks, and/or bone spurs. Other, less common causes include spinal stenosis, a spinal tumor, a pelvic injury or fracture, or diabetes. The sciatic nerve can also be compressed in the gluteal region. The piriformis muscle, which lies directly over the sciatic nerve in the buttox region, can spasm, pinching the nerve.

### How is it treated?

Treatment for sciatica may include pain medications, anti-inflammatories, anti-seizure medications, muscle relaxants, or steroid shots. Patients can also work with a physical therapist to strengthen the muscles around the spine and correct posture in order to decrease their risk of future injury.

If nerve compression leads to loss of bladder control or progressive pain that does not respond to conservative treatments, surgery may be required to remove the bone or disk tissue causing the compression. +



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