

# Sciatica

## Sciatica

You may be sure that anyone who has suffered through a full-blown case of sciatica will agree that the pain is one of life's most agonizing experiences. Because there is no other pain quite like it, it is difficult to make a comparison; but the worst toothache imaginable is of about the same magnitude as the devastating pain of acute sciatica.

## What is Sciatica?

Sciatica is a frequently misunderstood and underrated disease condition. It is often mistakenly called sciatic rheumatism. Some refer to it as lumbago, while others think of sciatica as being any low back or hip pain.

Actually, sciatica is a painful inflammation of the sciatic nerve which supplies the tissues of the thigh, lower leg, and foot. It is most often caused by a pinching of one or more spinal nerve roots between spinal bones (vertebrae) of the lower back.

## Other Causes

There are other causes. A mild case can be brought on by vitamin deficiencies or by arthritic inflammation in the lower spine. Prolonged constipation can build pressure on the nerve and cause the sciatic pain. Occasionally a tumor may develop near the nerve and press upon it. Sometimes a so-called herniated or "slipped" disc at the level where the nerve roots emerge in the low back may protrude and press upon the nerve. . .and thereby cause sciatica. However, these instances are rare. Pinching of the nerve is by far the most frequent cause.

## Sciatic Nerve Vital

The sciatic nerve is the largest nerve in the body – about as big around as the thumb. There are two sciatic nerves. One courses from the spine down the left leg, the other down the right leg. The roots of the sciatic nerve are in the lower spinal column. It is here that trouble is most likely to occur.

The importance of this nerve must not be overlooked. Its health is paramount because it is a main communication line between the brain and the thigh, lower leg, foot, and toes. Interference or irritation along any of its course can result in crippling pain.

## Victim Otherwise Healthy

The sciatica victim may be perfectly healthy in all other ways, yet the excruciating pain may make him a partial or total invalid. He may be at his correct weight.

The muscles may be perfectly developed. The heart, circulation, lungs, digestion . . .all may perform in perfect harmony . . .yet this one thing, the pinching of certain spinal nerves between spinal bones, can cause pain that is unbearable.

## Sciatic Pain

Sciatic pain is tearing and sharp. It shoots down the sciatic nerve and extends into the hip, the thigh, and the back portion of the leg. It may rip into the ankle and foot. The pain may visit all of these points at once or skip about from point to point. Although fairly constant, the pain sometimes lets up for an hour or so . . .or a day or so. It may be mild one minute, then rage agonizingly out of control the next. Even strong pain-killing drugs bring little or no relief. The sciatica victim is kept completely in the dark as to when the pain will subside or when it will get worse.

## Normal Life Impossible

With sciatica, living even a half-normal life is difficult because it is almost impossible to find a comfortable position. Standing is painful. Walking is painful. Sitting is painful. Driving a car is painful . . .climbing in and out is worse. Coughing, sneezing, or taking a deep breath can magnify the pain. Sometimes lying down on the side and curling up helps the sciatica victim in his desperate attempt to get some rest, but he can never be sure he will be able to catch as much as a catnap; and a full night's sleep may seem to be a blessing of the past.

## "Weak Back For Years"

Sciatica most often starts with a long period of intermittent, mild low back pain. The pain is often so mild in the beginning that many sufferers cannot recall when it started. "I've had a weak back for years," is a common expression among sciatica victims.

## Sciatic Warning

The mild low back pain may be ignored or lightly dismissed for years until, suddenly, the slightest wrong movement turns the seemingly meaningless pain into a violent sciatica. Sudden change in pain may be caused by lifting a weight, by falling, or by making a misstep; or it can be caused by merely bending over.

Because there is a human tendency to let considerable time go by, usually until the pain becomes severe, treatment may be unnecessarily complicated and prolonged. Therefore, it

is extremely important that any recurring back problem be corrected by the chiropractor as early as possible.

### **Chronic Sciatica**

Statistically, chronic sciatica occurs more frequently on the right side than on the left, and the pain becomes more intense in cold, damp weather. In such weather, the leg muscles tighten and increase the irritation of the already-sore nerve, while the skin of the affected leg becomes cold and clammy and mottled. If the condition goes on and on, sometimes the calf muscle begins to waste away.

### **What Can Chiropractic Do For Sciatica?**

Rarely do misaligned spinal bones correct themselves spontaneously and permanently. The answer lies in the experience, training, and skill of the doctor of chiropractic. Only rarely is it necessary for the patient to undergo surgery.

The chiropractor locates the misaligned vertebrae by means of x-ray pictures and other diagnostic methods. He aligns (adjusts) these vertebrae to relieve the nerve pressure, always keeping in mind that the patient wants relief as quickly as possible. The chiropractor uses no pain-killing drugs, so when pain is relieved, the patient can be sure the doctor is working on the underlying cause and not just the pain symptom. It usually takes time to stabilize the bones in proper position so that the vertebrae no longer pinch nerves, and the underlying cause of the sciatica or other condition has been corrected.

The doctor of chiropractic is the doctor with the specialized equipment coupled with the training, education, and experience to determine which vertebrae are involved in a sciatic condition, to what extent they are involved and what to do about it.