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SCIATICA - AYURVEDA

Sciatica is a general term for pain originating from the sciatic nerve. Sciatica is a symptom of a disorder that causes mild to sharp and sometimes excruciating pain. Patients have described sciatic pain as mildly disturbing to burning, aching, deep, and similar to a sudden bolt of lightning. Sciatic nerve pain travels from the buttock, down the back of the thigh, and into the leg. Leg pain is the classic hallmark of **sciatica**. Low back pain may accompany sciatica, and some patients experience sciatic pain extending into the foot. Another characteristic of sciatica is it usually affects either the lower left or right side of the body.

Sciatic pain can make life miserable. Walking, standing, bending over, driving a car, working at a computer, catching up on household chores, sneezing or coughing, and many other activities of daily living can cause sudden and intense pain. Patients who suffer sciatica, especially of a more acute nature, find the symptoms disrupt many aspects of their life.

One reason the sciatic nerve causes so much pain is because it is the longest nerve in the body! The nerve starts at the back of the pelvis and runs downward through the hip area and buttocks into each leg. Near the knee, the sciatic nerve divides into two nerves??the tibial and peroneal nerves. The tibial nerve runs behind the knee and the peroneal nerve runs along the side of the calf and ankle. Through the tibial and peroneal nerves, the sciatic nerve innervates ('stimulates') the action of many muscles in the lower legs and enables feeling in the thighs, legs, and feet.

Besides pain, other symptoms may accompany sciatica. These symptoms include sensations such as tingling, pins and needles, burning, numbness or muscle weakness. Such symptoms may be felt in the buttock, thigh, behind the knee, calf, ankle, and sometimes the foot.

Causes of Sciatica

It's important to understand what conditions cause sciatica because remember, sciatica is not a condition ??? it's a medical term used to describe symptoms caused by other low back conditions.

Several low back conditions can cause sciatica, including:

??? Bulging disc or herniated disc: This is the most common cause of sciatica. When a disc bulges, the gel-like center (nucleus pulposus) pushes against the outer wall of the disc (annulus fibrosus). A herniated disc means that the nucleus pulposus breaks through the annulus fibrosus. With both bulging and herniated discs, the disc material can press on nerve roots, causing sciatica. The consequences of a herniated disc are worse than those of a bulging disc. The disc material that leaks out contains an acidic, chemical irritant (hyaluronic acid) that causes nerve inflammation. ??? Degenerative disc disease (DDD): **Sciatica** is a common result of the aging process that affects discs called degenerative disc disease. DDD is a change in the disc shape and function, and it can result in a bulging disc or a herniated disc and pain. ??? Piriformis syndrome: The piriformis muscle, located in the lower part of the spine, connects to the thighbone, and helps you rotate your hip. The sciatic nerve runs under the piriformis muscle, so muscle spasms can compress the sciatic nerve. It may be difficult to diagnose and treat as it is not easily identified by x-ray or MRI. ??? Pregnancy: The extra weight and pressure on your spine caused by pregnancy can cause compression of the sciatic nerve. The symptoms will usually go away after childbirth. ??? Spinal stenosis: Your nerves travel through passageways in your spine, and when this space narrows (stenosis), it can put pressure on the nerves in your low back. ??? Spinal tumors and spinal infections: Although very rare, tumors and infections can compress the sciatic nerve. ??? Spondylolisthesis: If a vertebra slips forward over the vertebra below it, it's called spondylolisthesis. This slip can pinch the nerve root and cause sciatica. ??? Trauma: You can develop **sciatica** because of direct nerve compression from an outside force. For example, you could be injured in a car accident, resulting in a pinched nerve in your low back.

Ayurveda is specialized in treating Sciatica with highest treatment success rate. It offers excellent Panchakarma therapies along with internal medicines for treating Sciatica.

Ayurveda described sciatica as Gridhrasi (Gridhra means Eagle), as the gait of the affected person resembles that of an eagle's walk and the inflamed nerve appears like eagle's beak.

Ayurveda categorized Sciatica as one of diseases caused by vitiation Vata (one of the principle dosha in the body, responsible for the movement and functionality of the body). Sometimes even kapha (dosha responsible for lubrication and bodily fluids) vitiation along with vata (vata kaphaj) also causes **sciatica**.

Treatment in Ayurveda is aimed at restoring the equilibrium through correction of the underlying functional in-equilibrium. Ayurvedic treatments for Sciatica concentrate on bringing back the aggravated vata or vata kapha to the state of equilibrium and thereby to the state of health.

Treatment comprises of three approaches, Elimination (Sodhanam) of the accumulated toxic products of digestion, metabolism and the disease process, Pacification (Samanam) and correction of the entities responsible for altered functioning and Rasayanam (Rejuvenation) of the bodily tissue to regain and maintain natural strength and vitality.

The strength of Ayurveda in the area of spine and joint treatments is globally appreciated. Since it addresses the root cause of the issue the results are fantastic. Therapies like Abyanga swedam, Pathrapotala swedam, Choornapinda swedam, Pizhichil, Shirodhara, Kadeevasthy, Navarakizhi, Vasti (the most important procedure in Ayurveda for curing Sciatica permanently) etc. are done as per the necessity and condition. These therapies are directed towards relieving the inflammatory changes and underlying causes of Sciatica, releasing the spasms and nerve compressions in the affected area, strengthening and nourishing entire spine & supporting tissues. Usually the treatment period is 3 - 5 weeks according to the severity of the disease.

Along with these therapies, Ayurveda has also described Sira vedana (Venesection) and Agni karma (Heat therapy) for treating Sciatica.

In four to six weeks, the majority of patients find their symptoms are relieved without surgery.

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