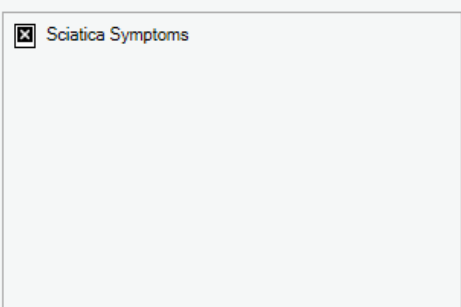


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# Sciatica Symptoms

Pain is the most common symptom from *sciatica*. Often only affecting one side of the lower body, **Sciatica** pain extends from the lower back, through the lower back of the thigh and down through the leg. This pain may also extend to the foot or toes depending on the location of where the sciatic nerve is being affected. Most people will describe this as a deep severe pain that is worsened with certain movements. From a mild ache to a sharp burning sensation, causing extreme discomfort, sciatica pain is never the same for any one person. The pain can be so intense and uncomfortable that at times it may feel like a jolt or an electric shock. Often starting gradually, sciatica pain intensifies over time. Most often only one lower extremity is affected. Sciatica pain can be severe and debilitating for some people, while for others the pain caused by the sciatica can be irritating but infrequent. With sciatica there is always potential for it to get worse. It is best to seek a professional diagnostic and follow recommended therapy for any form of sciatica, however mild it may be. In addition to pain, if you suffer from sciatica you may also experience: Muscle weakness or numbness: This will be felt along the nerve pathway in your leg or foot. You may have painful sciatica symptoms in one part of your leg, and numbness in another area making it difficult to move the leg or foot. Tingling or pins and needles feeling: This feeling is usually felt in part of your foot or in your toes. Loss of bladder or bowel control: Associated with Cauda Equina syndrome, this is a sign of this rare and serious condition that requires immediate emergency care. If you experience either of these symptoms, it is imperative that you seek emergency medical attention immediately. A few other symptoms that require no explanation are Pain in the rear or leg that worsens when you are sitting A constant pain on one side of the buttock Shooting pain making it difficult to stand up **Sciatica** symptoms can often be made worse with prolonged sitting or standing positions. Described by some people, the worst pain feeling like trying to stand from a low sitting position, such as standing up after sitting on a toilet seat for a duration. A hard bowel movement, coughing, sneezing, laughing or a sudden jerking motion will most often make the pain worse in most people. Often when stretching people will bend backwards to try and loosen up some muscles, this is another way some people aggravate their sciatica symptoms. I usually do not repeat myself but I am going to for this purpose. If you have progressive lower extremity weakness and or loss of bladder or bowel control, it is imperative that you seek professional medical attention for your *sciatica* symptoms immediately. Sciatica conditions can worsen with time. Self diagnosing is never recommended and seeking professional medical attention is always a better alternative. A well trained professional can help you bring your sciatica symptoms under control and help you live with a higher quality of life.



Sciatica can occur at any time in a normal pregnancy but it is most common during the second and third trimester, when the baby is larger and carried lower in the abdomen. Known as Pregnancy-Related **Sciatica**, it is caused by the pressure of the baby on the sciatic nerve. This is the largest nerve in the body, about the diameter of a finger. Its fibers branch off the spinal cord at the 4th and 5th lumbar vertebra (L4, L5) and the first few segments of the sacrum.

If you aren't able to get in to the chiropractor or physical therapist right away or you hope to help improve your situation at least in part on your own, here are some tips to help relieve the pain associated with **sciatica**.

Move it! While sitting in a straight-back chair is helpful in supporting your lower back and spine, be sure that you aren't sitting for any longer than 15-20 minutes at a time. Lack of movement in the joints of the spine especially can cause further damage, stiffness and muscle strain. Getting up and moving frequently, even if only to stretch or walk gently around the room will help to keep circulation fresh and facilitate a quicker recovery. Be sure that you stay well within your limits; if you are pushing yourself too hard and it is causing pain, then stop and give yourself a rest.

Go for a massage. It stands to reason that if your **sciatica** is due to irritation of the sciatic nerve from spasm of your piriformis, hamstring or lower back muscles, deep tissue massage can be of great benefit to you. Getting a massage or even using a massager at home that is able to get into the deeper tissues of the buttocks and low back may help relieve some or all of your sciatic pain. At the very least, it can help to reduce the stress that commonly accumulates when you are in pain.

Take a break from your regular exercise routine to give your sciatic nerve a break. If you simply must exercise, try non-impact exercises of the upper body, like resistive exercise band exercise or exercise ball exercises. Swimming may be a helpful alternative to your regular routine as well.

??? Moist heat alternated with ice packs ??? Chiropractic treatments may be helpful. Be sure to select a practitioner experienced in treating prenatal patients.

Sciatica is quite simply irritation of the sciatic nerve. This can happen several different ways at a few different points in the nerve's journey from the low back to and through the leg.

??? When getting out of bed, try rolling onto your side first, letting the weight of your feet and legs dangling over the edge of the bed, pull your body into a sitting position. This puts less stress on the lower back, helping you to avoid triggering a painful muscle spasm.

The better you take care of yourself, the greater health and vitality you will enjoy.

## About the Author:

Dr. Nick Preston is a chiropractor focused on helping families enjoy greater health and founder of Wisdom and Health. If you want to learn more about sciatica and find products designed to help you, check out [www.wisdomandhealth.com/sciatica.html](http://www.wisdomandhealth.com/sciatica.html). You can also find products which will help you quickly make your leg pain a distant memory.

??? Maintain proper posture and try to stand straight. ??? Wear flat shoes or ones with a very low heel. Avoid shoes that throw your weight backwards.

Get professional help. It is always a good idea to seek help from a chiropractor, medical doctor, physical therapist or massage therapist when you experience pain in the low back and/or legs. Waiting too long to effectively treat a condition involving your nerves can cause problems as mild as missing time from work all the way up to irreversible nerve damage. It is wise to effectively and completely deal with any problems involving your nerves, as doing so will help prevent similar problems from rearing their ugly head again down the road.

Get some sleep. Sleep is one of the most critical components in helping start and in maintaining a healing process. When you sleep, your body does its best work of healing and repairs the damage done throughout the day. Following any injury or during any illness, regular sleep is critical in helping your body get the upper hand.

??? Bedrest may be necessary at times. ??? See your physician if the pain becomes unmanageable. **Sciatica** is unique to a pregnancy and may gradually disappear on its own. Just because you had sciatica in one pregnancy does not mean it will appear in a subsequent one.

In severe cases the leg may feel weak and the strength may be reduced. Often, disc bulges cause no back pain at all; the symptoms are felt only in the legs.

Stretching the piriformis muscle can be done several different ways. However, when your sciatic nerve is screaming, the easiest stretch involves lying on your back with your knees bent and pulling one knee at a time up towards the opposite shoulder and holding it for 5-30 seconds. You will know you are getting a good stretch when you feel a mild stretch in the buttocks near the hip.

At each vertebra the spinal cord branches out to form a nerve root, these nerve roots leave the spine via a gap between each vertebra and then bundle together to form much larger nerves.

Most physicians avoid prescribing medications for pregnant patients suffering from **sciatica** but there are several steps that can be taken to relieve or decrease the discomfort. This includes:

What are the symptoms of sciatica? If someone has true sciatica then they often have pain in the legs, usually in the buttock, back of the thigh or calf. There may also be pins and needles and numbness in parts of the leg.

Sciatica is caused by a sciatic nerve irritation. This is most commonly caused by a disc bulge in the lower back. What is the sciatic nerve?

Get it straight. Your posture plays an important role in the health of your spine. Sitting and standing as straight as is comfortably possible will help to reduce the effects of nerve irritation and get your nerves healing quicker and more completely. Avoid sitting in soft couches or chairs, as they will not give you the support that you need to sit well. Instead, drag a kitchen chair into the living room and spend your time sitting in a more supportive chair. Use a back support cushions in every chair you sit in; whether at work, in the car or at home to help support your back properly.

??? Try to avoid significant weight gain. ??? Try sleeping on a firm mattress, lying on one side. A pillow rolled up under the knees may be helpful.

An important thing to know is that many people have disc bulges and have no symptoms at all. There are some other conditions that can cause sciatic nerve pain but they are much less common. These include degenerative disc disease, severe osteoarthritis, spinal stenosis or spondylolisthesis. Fractures, tumours and infection can also cause sciatica.

The disc can and does cause problems however. Sometimes the central area of the disc bulges, usually backwards and sideways. This can cause an irritation of the nerve root as it leaves the spine. Occasionally the bulge is severe enough to actually squash or trap the nerve but this is fairly rare.

Have you ever experienced a literal pain in the butt that continues all the way down your leg? Has it ever felt like someone was sticking a hot poker into your leg? If either of these scenarios is familiar to you, you've probably suffered from sciatica, a pain in the sciatic nerve. No one experiencing **sciatica** wants it to stick around any longer than, well, at all, so let's not delay in discovering how you can make your leg pain a distant memory.

Running down through the middle of the spine is a channel called the spinal canal, its here that the spinal cord sits. The spinal cord is the main structure that passes messages from our brains to our bodies.

Imagine the surprise a woman must feel while dealing with the physical symptoms and discomforts of pregnancy, to suddenly develop severe back pain. This is not the usual low back pain that is often experienced during pregnancy; it is sciatica. This sharp, shooting pain usually starts in the buttocks and radiates down the back or side of the thigh to the calf and possibly the heel. There may be paralyzing numbness, in addition to the pain, which can be severe enough to limit mobility.

If after 4-5 days you choose to alternate ice and heat, keep it off from the spine and limit heat use, especially with a heating pad, to no more than 20 minutes. Avoid sleeping while applying heat, as it can cause burns and can dry out the tissues, slowing the healing process.

The best way to tell if it is sciatica is to undergo a series of test that your physiotherapist or doctor can perform. These simple clinical tests will be enough to identify if the problem is an irritated sciatic nerve. Paula Fitzpatrick is a British trained physiotherapist specialising in the treatment of back pain. Visit The Lower Back Pain Toolkit for up to date, reliable information about the causes and treatment of lower back pain. Learn more about *sciatica* and sciatic nerve pain.

Put on some relief. Topical analgesics can help alleviate some of the bite of the pain of **sciatica** while helping soothe the spasm in the muscles of the low back, buttocks and upper leg. Getting even temporary relief from your sciatica can help your healing process by providing you an opportunity to rest or sleep.

As the pregnancy develops, the abdominal tendons and ligaments become looser to prepare for childbirth. The backs of some women become quite unstable and prone to injury. Medical evaluation should always be sought. In some cases, sciatic pain is due to pressure on the nerve that is caused by damage to the disc between the vertebrae of the spine. This creates inflammation and pain and requires specific treatment.

In addition, these helpful habits may decrease the chances of developing **sciatica**: ??? Avoid hours of sitting slumped at a computer or standing with a baby on one hip. Both can contribute to lower back pain.

To understand and defeat the beast that is sciatica, it will be helpful to understand what it is and what causes it. The sciatic nerve is the largest nerve in your body, which starts in the low back and travels all the way down your legs to the bottom of your feet. It controls nearly everything within your legs: from the large hamstring and quadriceps muscles in your upper legs to the smallest blood vessels in the bottom of your feet.

In the legs there are two main, large nerves, the femoral nerve at the front and the sciatic nerve at the back. The sciatic nerve passes down through the buttock area into the back of the thigh and leg.

??? Swimming and walking are excellent exercises if not contra-indicated by the physician. ??? Avoid walking on an incline as this can cause joint irritation and lead to problems.

What causes sciatic nerve pain? The most common cause of sciatica is a disc bulge. The disc is a very misunderstood structure; it has been blamed for back pain ever since it was discovered. Over the years we have started to believe that the disc is a really weak and vulnerable structure.

Why are so many people given the diagnosis of *sciatica*? Very often, as soon as anyone has any lower back or leg symptoms they are told that have sciatica. However, there are other things that can cause leg pain; a strained facet joint for example can cause pain in the buttock and thigh. But if the sciatic nerve is not irritated then it is not sciatica.

??? Williams Exercises have been developed specifically for use during pregnancy. They may temporarily relieve sciatica pain as they help strengthen the muscles of the pelvic floor, the back and abdomen.

??? Massage to reduce muscle tension. Some experts believe that tightness in the gluteus and psoas muscles contribute to sciatic pain. Treatment once or twice a week can help relieve stress on weight-bearing joints.

Sciatica or sciatic nerve pain is a term often used to describe all sorts of back pain. In fact, less than 5% of people who suffer from lower back pain will have sciatica.

Stretch yourself. Relaxing the muscles in the lower back, buttocks and upper legs through stretching will help reduce the strain on the sciatic nerve and the joints throughout the lower back and pelvis. Always stretch gently and avoid any further stretching if it causes sharp pain or if it aggravates your problem.

Even if you end up seeking professional help to deal with *sciatica*, incorporating practical home care can help shorten your recovery time and get you out of pain quicker. If pain in your buttocks and legs is something that you would rather avoid than deal with again, use these tips regularly to give yourself the best chance of preventing **sciatica** for years to come.

To understand this you need to have a bit of an idea about human spine anatomy. The spine is made up of large bones called vertebra. These bones are separated from one another by spinal discs. Each vertebra overlaps the next at the back to form a joint called a facet joint.

Frequently sciatic nerve pain is a result of the joints in your lower spine being poorly aligned and putting pressure or stretching on the nerves as they come off from your spine. This problem is called a subluxation and is diagnosed and treated by chiropractors. Sciatica can also commonly occur due to spasm of a muscle in the buttock called the piriformis muscle. The sciatic nerve passes under this muscle as it travels through the pelvis near the hip down to the back of your leg. This problem is frequently treated by physical therapists, chiropractors and massage therapists.

Chill out. Ice will be your best friend when you are suffering from *sciatica*. Placing a cold pack or ice pack on the lower spine, tailbone and/or buttock for 20 minutes once every 2-3 hours will help reduce swelling and also reduce pain. It is important to use ice exclusively at the onset of sciatica, as it has been found to decrease the length of time needed for healing.

Give it a rest. Exercise is a great asset to getting and staying healthy, but when your sciatic nerve is unhappy, exercise will frequently flare up your problem and slow your progress. Especially if the piriformis muscle is involved, exercise which causes pounding, such as walking, running, tennis, basketball, soccer, etc., will flare the piriformis spasm and put additional strain on the spine in the lower part of the back.

Drink like a fish. To drink like a fish, you need to drink what a fish drinks: water, lots and lots of water. When your body isn't hydrated properly, the tissues become tacky and adhesions form. If adhesions form, this slows the healing process and causes increased scar formation. Adhesions can form between your sciatic nerve and the surrounding tissues, causing your healing process to be incomplete and leaving you vulnerable to frequent, repeated sciatic episodes.

When the nerve is irritated by the disc bulge it can become inflamed. Remember what it feels like to hit your finger with a hammer or catch it in a door for a moment. Following the nasty sharp pain you are left with a dull ache. The finger may become red and swollen; there may be some heat or warmth there. After a while, those symptoms settle and everything gets back to normal. Its very similar with the sciatic nerve. It becomes very sore and can give you a lot of pain, even though it is not actually trapped or squashed.

The term slipped disc makes it sound as if it can slip about inside. In truth the disc cant slip anywhere, it is firmly fixed at the top and at the bottom to the vertebrae above and below.

## About the Author:

Paul G Miller is a Ft Lauderdale chiropractic therapist who has worked with individuals with back pain problems for seven years. If you would like to receive a free weekly newsletter on back pain relief visit [www.usspincare.com](http://www.usspincare.com) and also to get more in-depth information.

David Lind

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