Sciatica
All You Need To Know

Watch a Video for Sciatica
What is it?

Sciatica refers to pain in the lower back, buttocks, or legs radiating from the sciatic nerve. The sciatic nerve is a major neural pathway that runs down the lower back, through the buttocks, and down the leg. Usually, sciatica is only present on one side.

Causes:

Sciatica occurs when the sciatic nerve is compressed. The nerve can become compressed due to a herniated disc, bone spurs in the spine, spinal stenosis where the spinal column narrows, pregnancy, muscle spasm, or certain diseases and conditions such as a tumor where the lower spine or sciatic nerve are compressed. Age, occupation, and obesity can be further contributing factors to sciatica.
Common Complaints:

Common complaints from individuals with sciatica include low back pain, pain radiating through the buttocks and legs, pain that worsens in sitting, weakness, tingling, or numbness radiating down the buttocks and legs, or a shooting pain. Severe symptoms can include sudden and severe low back pain following traumatic injury, or loss of bowel or bladder control. If more severe symptoms occur, seek immediate medical attention.

Prevention and/or Self-care:

Self-care can involve over-the-counter medications to ease the pain and inflammation such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen, and naproxen. If over-the-counter medications do not work, muscle relaxants, certain narcotics, antidepressants, and anti-seizure medications may be prescribed by a doctor to counteract pain symptoms.

Ice when applied for 10 minutes at a time, with 45 minute intervals, can decrease pain and inflammation. Heat is also a viable option in order to relax tense muscles and promote increased blood flow to the area.

Corticosteroid injections may be prescribed by a doctor as a temporary pain reliever. The injection can relieve the inflammation around the neural root. However, it is not a permanent fix and long-term use can have serious side effects.

Acupuncture has reported to relieve pain symptoms for some individuals.

Surgery is often done only for severe cases. The bone spur or herniated disc may be removed to release the compression on the sciatic nerve.
**Lifestyle changes:**

Change in daily habits can dramatically improve some conditions, as well as prevent future incidences from occurring. Regular exercise, specifically involving core strengthening, can protect the back from future injury. Stretching the back, buttocks, and leg muscles can further relieve the compression on the sciatic nerve. Exercise can also aid in weight loss if that is attributed as being a causal factor.

Proper posture throughout the day can aid in correct alignment of the spine preventing strains and stresses on certain muscles and joints. When performing lifting or twisting tasks, ensure to use proper form and engage the core muscles to protect the back.

Sleeping arrangements, such as a bed mattress or pillows, and ergonomic setups, such as that in a work office, could be aggravating factors. Occupational therapists and physical therapists can help in addressing these problems and finding solutions to reduce discomforts.

**Cautions:**

Avoid movements that aggravate the problem and increase pain or symptoms. Avoid long periods of sedentary activity. If working a desk job, walking breaks or stretches every hour for even just 5 minutes can ease symptoms and prevent reoccurrence.

* References:
  1. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1895638/