

# Sciatica

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Sciatica is generally referred to as an inflammation of sciatic nerve. Leg pain, tingling, weakness or numbness which patients perceive from low back down the sciatic nerve are the most common symptoms of sciatica. Alternative medicine is a popular and a well-recognized approach to treating sciatica; but while massage and homeopathy can bring substantial relief and provide patients with a chance for a happy living, alternative medicine has its limitations and should be well balanced with traditional methods of medical treatment.

Sciatica is “ a non-specific term commonly applied to the symptom of pain radiating downward from the buttock over the posterior or outer side of the lower limb” (Travell & Simons, 1993). Hochschuler (2007) writes that the definition of sciatica covers a whole range of symptoms, from leg pain up to tingling. In reality, though, sciatica is nothing else but a compression of the sciatic nerve. To a large extent, sciatica may accompany low back pain or can be an independent health condition.

Despite the seriousness of symptoms and consequences which sciatica may produce on human health, it is at least incorrect to consider it a disease or illness. Rather, it would be correct to say that sciatica is a health condition which requires timely response and can be readily treated with the help of traditional or alternative medicine. However, sciatica may also be a sign of a larger problem and should be studied in the context of all related health problems in each particular patient.

The symptoms of sciatica vary. For some people, sciatica is debilitating and severe, while for others the pain is less frequent and less irritating, but may

lead to irreversible neurological consequences. The most common symptoms include cramping or aching sensations; burning and / or shooting pain down the leg; numbness, reduced sensation, paresthesia, and even the loss of normal function (Braun & Simonson, 2007).

Where sciatica results in progressive leg weakness or bladder dysfunction, patients are recommended to seek immediate medical advice (Hochschuler, 2007). Those having progressive leg weakness or bladder dysfunction, equina syndrome, cancer, or HIV should also address medical professionals to avoid long-term neurological complications. Traditional treatments of sciatica range from medical preparations to surgery. Medicines are not the mainline treatment for sciatica, but they remain one of the most important components of successful sciatica treatment.

Medical treatment usually produces a double positive effect on patients: on the one hand, it relieves pain; on the other hand, medicines work in ways that facilitate physiotherapy and manipulation “ by relieving pain, relaxing muscles, allaying anxiety and thereby increasing confidence” (Barrett & Golding, 1985). The most widely spread drugs in sciatica treatment are analgesics, sedatives, psychotropic drugs, and anti-inflammatory drugs.

Physiotherapy usually implies various types of physical treatment, and is used to relieve pain, improve spine movements, and strengthen back muscles (Barrett & Golding, 1985). For patients with acute sciatica, physical treatment does not play an important role and can only be relevant when it comes to chronic sciatica forms. It should be noted, that sciatica tends to get better without any external medical involvement, and the length of the

healing process does not exceed several weeks; but when occasional pain becomes regular, it is an indication of a health state that should be managed externally.

Given the irrelevance of the major medical procedures and their relatively low effectiveness in treating sciatica, alternative medicine has become an extremely popular method of addressing the symptoms and complications in sciatica patients. Massage, acupuncture, homeopathy – all these are successfully utilized to relieve the pain and other symptoms in acute and chronic sciatica patients. Homeopathy has already proved to be an efficient remedy (Hershoff & Seymour, 1999). “ Of the acute group, Colocynthis ranks first and foremost, followed by Chamomilla.

Gnaphalium occupies a medium ground, while Rhus tox, Phytolacca, Aresnium, Lycopodium, and Ammonium mur are for increasingly stubborn and long-term symptoms (Hershoff & Seymour, 1999). Ammonia chloride is used for treating acute sciatica symptoms, where tearing into tips of toes and shooting prevail; arsenicum is mostly used to address burning pain; Chamomilla provides a relief from extremely intense pain, while Gnaphalium successfully eliminates numbness, crawling, and tingling (Hershoff & Seymour, 1999). Sciatica is not readily included into the scope of massage treatment due to its neurological roots.

Treating a nerve root is considered inappropriate, and for true sciatica “ that stems from the spinal cord or nerve root” massage is locally contraindicated (Braun & Simonson, 2007). Any type of massage is appropriate when sciatica results of muscular impingement. Massage is expected to relax the most

problematic muscular zones, and as a result, to relieve the pressure which muscles produce on the sciatic nerve. However, before any massage treatment is offered or prescribed, a detailed examination of the patient with suspected sciatica needs to be performed, to ensure that the massage does not produce negative effects on the patient's health.

Alternative treatments of sciatica are not limited to massage and homeopathy. Since ancient times, acupuncture has been fairly regarded as one of the most effective approaches to eliminating the symptoms of sciatica across different groups of patients. Acupuncture is based on the assumption that free flow of energy via specific body pathways can maintain a patient's wellbeing; and when it comes to using acupuncture for sciatica cases, a set of needles are inserted into the skin around the pain area (Hochschuler, 2007).

Acupuncture has been officially approved by the U. S. authorities as a reliable and fully acceptable method of treating patients with diagnosed sciatica; the benefits of acupuncture are also successfully used for other types of back pain. Despite the positive effects which acupuncture tends to produce on the lives and health of sciatica patients, the current state of research suggests that chiropractic may be the most effective treatment methodology for sciatica with various etiology.

Credit, Hartunian and Nowak (1999) write that “ through observation, palpation of vertebrae, manual movements, and a nerve reflex test, the chiropractor can identify misalignments and muscle weaknesses”. In other words, chiropractic can also be referred to as manual manipulation. The

main objective of chiropractic is to correct these muscular misalignments in ways that improve the patient's health and wellbeing. Depending on the severity of sciatica symptoms, the duration of treatment may vary from two to fifteen visits, with the estimated cost of each visit between \$50 and \$100 (Credit, Hartunian & Nowak, 1999).

Conclusion Sciatica is a sciatic nerve inflammation. Although sciatica frequently gets better without external medical treatment, different forms of traditional and alternative treatment are successfully applied to relieve its symptoms and improve the patient's wellbeing. Given that each type of medical treatment has its limitations, a well-balanced therapy will imply a reasonable combination of traditional and non-traditional medical interventions, to increase the effectiveness of all treatment procedures.