

PATIENT
INFORMATION
LEAFLET

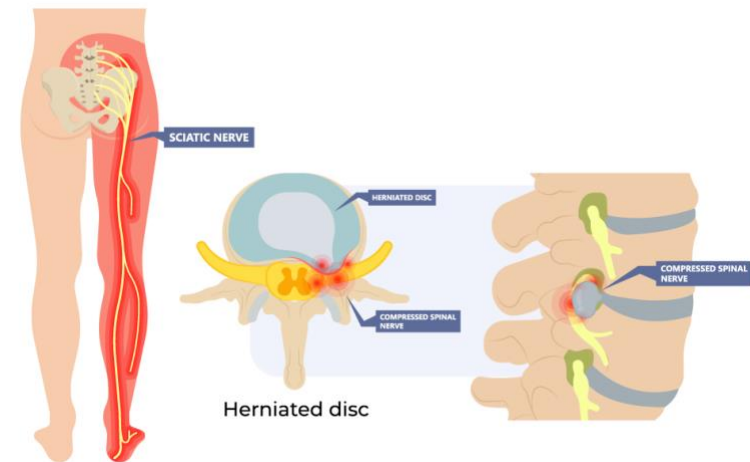
Low back pain with sciatica

Airedale NHS Foundation Trust
Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Bradford District and Craven Clinical Commissioning Group

Introduction

Here are some facts about low back and referred leg symptoms.

- Sciatica is pain that travels down the back of the leg from the lower back or buttock to the foot.
- It is often accompanied by back pain, the leg pain can be worse than the back pain.
- The nerves leave the spine through small tunnels made by the bones of the spine. The sciatic nerve can be irritated.
- If any of the nerves leaving the spine are irritated this can cause pain along the length of the sciatic nerve.
- X-rays are rarely useful in diagnosing back pain, and don't help to guide treatment, either from your GP or physiotherapist. Most x-rays will show normal, age related changes, which are not a cause for pain



Symptoms of low back pain with sciatica

Radiculopathy describes symptoms produced by the pinching of a nerve root in the spinal column. Sciatica is one of the most common types of radiculopathy and refers to pain that originates in your lower back and travels to your buttocks and down the sciatic nerve.

Sciatica is rarely the sign of a serious problem. It can however be very painful -the pain you experience does not mean ongoing damage is being done. It can cause the following symptoms;

- Sharp shooting pain
- Pins and needles
- Numbness

The sciatic nerves send messages to the brain about the irritation and it makes the brain think the problem is the nerve itself and not in the back which is actually the cause of the pain.

Remember 9 out of 10 cases resolve without specialist input and treatment, more than 7 out of 10 people report improvements in their symptoms within 4 weeks.

Self management of low back pain with sciatica

- Keep active - change your position regularly
- You may find that you need to take regular pain relief this will help you move.
- Pace yourself with activity and movement
- You will be given advice on activities that will help you- it is common to have some degree of discomfort during recovery, but this is not harmful.
- Keeping mobile with gentle exercises and this activity will maintain your back movements, preventing a long-term problem
- Remember if you have specific concerns it is important to discuss this with your GP or health care professional.

Most sciatic nerve problems improve with time, the following self - management strategies may help;

- Make sure you have adequate pain relief
- Make sure you get appropriate sleep – pain often interferes with the sleep cycle. Appropriate pain control can help.
- Try to remain active wherever possible. Pace your activity but do not avoid movement
- Try some exercises to keep your back and nerve tissue moving.
- Don't do anything that causes excessive pain, but don't be frightened of it either, you may have to accept some discomfort when you are trying to keep active and whilst doing exercises.

- Try and relax and try and manage your stress -low mood, fear and anxiety can impact on pain. Mindfulness or Relaxation techniques can sometimes help

What treatments are available for low back pain with sciatica?

- Your GP or health care practitioner will establish whether you have sciatic symptoms and will assist you in the management of your symptoms.
- Speak to your pharmacist who can advise you what pain relief to take and which are available over the counter.
- They may refer you to the Musculoskeletal Service for further assessment if your symptoms are not settling.

Despite improvements in symptoms in most people, there are some situations where if things don't improve to a manageable level then a referral to the Musculoskeletal Service will be made

In these cases an MRI may help to determine if there is a clear structural reason for the nerve irritation.

The following treatments may be considered

Injection Therapy: Steroid injections targeting the nerve, or the space around the nerve in the spine, are sometimes used to help severe leg pain when it is not improving. They can offer short term pain relief in some people but are rarely a long term solution. They are only used in

select cases and usually only if all conservative measures have been tried.

Surgery: Surgical treatments for sciatica are only considered in specific circumstances when either there is significant weakness of muscles or symptoms are severe, debilitating and resistant to all other treatments. However while surgery may improve the pain in the short term, in the long term (more than 1 year after surgery) people who undergo surgery for pain have very similar outcomes to those that don't

When is it important to seek urgent help?

Seek medical help if you have the following symptoms;

- You are unable to pass urine when you feel the need to go
- Have numbness around your bottom/ saddle region.
- Have loss of control of your bowels.
- You are unable to get an erection.
- You have pain in both legs and/or worsening weakness in the legs.

Exercises for low back pain with sciatica

Exercise 1: Pelvic tilts



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- Put your hands on your hips. Slowly roll your pelvis - tilt your tailbone - upward and close the space between your low back and the floor.
- You'll feel a gentle stretch of your low back.
- Return to the original position.

Exercise 2: Knee rolls



- Lie on your back. Keep your knees bent and together.
- Keep your upper body relaxed. Roll your knees to one side, keeping both shoulders on the floor.
- Hold the stretch in your back/hip and return to the starting position.

Exercise 3: Supine Knee Hug



- Lie on your back and lift your knees up towards your chest.
- Hold your knees with your arms.
- Next, lift your head up towards your knees.
- Hold this position and repeat.

Exercise 4: Standing Side Bend Stretch



- Start in a standing position.
- Next, bend your trunk to the side as you slide your hand down the side of your legs.
- Do not bend forward or back.
- Repeat to the other side.
- Keep your muscles relaxed during the movement.

Exercise 5: Sciatic Nerve Flossing



- Sit in a slumped position on a chair with your hands behind your back.
- Straighten your knee and pull your foot up until a slight stretch is felt at the back of your leg.
- Now, extend your neck to look up. This is the starting position.
- Bring your chin to your chest as you point your toes. Look up to the ceiling as you pull your toes up. "Head up, foot up. Head down, foot down".