

The Yellow Sheet



What is Sciatica?

SCIATICA.....a real pain in the BUTT!! Deb Pettit

Sciatica is a condition which is characterized by pain traveling the length of the sciatic nerves, which run from the spine down the back of each leg. The placement of this nerve causes sciatica sufferers to feel pain in the back of the hip and down the back of the leg. The pain can range from numbness and tingling to pain as devastating in magnitude as the worst toothache imaginable.

Sciatica sufferers are often perfectly healthy in every other way. You can be at your ideal weight, have a healthy heart and lungs and still be stricken with sciatica.

The sciatic nerve is the largest and longest nerve in the body; it is approximately as big around as your thumb. Our nerves leave the spinal cord, pass through spaces in the vertebrae and from there, they go to the parts of the body that they enervate, or take sensation to.

The sciatic nerve starts in the low back (4th lumbar-3rd sacral vertebrae), passes through the deep muscles of the posterior hip (butt), and sends sensations to the hip and the backs of the legs. When there is something irritating or damaging this nerve, sciatic pain is felt.

Several conditions can cause this type of pain. Some of the most common are piriformis muscle syndrome and hamstring spasms. Sciatica can also be caused by trauma to the area such as a fracture or a blunt force hit or fall to the area. Also, sitting for long periods of time with pressure on the buttocks can bring on sciatic pain or sitting on a large wallet or driving for long periods with your leg and hip muscles tightened can also contribute to the pain.

When the pain is caused by piriformis muscle syndrome or hamstring spasms, massage therapy is very useful in easing the pain. These two conditions are considered soft tissue problems and involve muscles, tendons and ligaments rather than bones.

Most of the clients I see with complaints of sciatic pain suffer from piriformis muscle syndrome. The piriformis muscle is deep in the back of the hip. It attaches to the inside of your sacrum (tailbone) on one end, and to your hipbone at the other end. The primary function of the piriformis muscle is to turn the leg out like a ballerina. When this muscle becomes tight, it puts pressure on the emerging sciatic nerve, causing pain in the hip and down the back of the leg. This condition can be caused by inactivity, but also by overuse. If you feel your sciatica is caused by soft tissue problem, see a massage therapist. If you feel that the pain is due to a preexisting back or hip problem, see a doctor. Whichever condition you suffer from, help is available. Seek the appropriate care.

