

## Sciatica

### What is sciatica?

Sciatica is a symptom that refers to the pain from the lower back that runs down the back of the leg which causes pain, numbness or tingling in the leg.

### What causes sciatica?

There are many causes, but sciatica is most often caused by overuse of your back such as lifting something too heavy or an injury to your back like falling. Overuse of the muscles can cause a spasm which irritates the sciatic nerve. Other causes are from a ruptured disc, tumors, infections, stiffening of the spine or a narrowing of the spinal canal.



### How is it treated?

Most people with sciatica get better in time.

- Non prescription medications for pain and inflammation (like Ibuprofen or Aleve) can help.
- Use ice packs for the first 48 hours and then
- Apply a heat (like a heating pad) to the area may also help.
- If you sleep on your side, place a pillow between your knees or if you sleep on your back, place a pillow or rolled towel under your knees
- Often the pain goes away in a week or two.



In the meanwhile, do not lift over 5 pounds and avoid bending at the waist or other activities that increase the pain.

### How can sciatica be prevented?

Sciatica can return. To prevent this from happening again

- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Do regular aerobic exercises to keep your back and abdominal muscles in shape
- Learn to lift things properly by bending your knees and using your thigh muscles
- Good posture is important, especially while sitting



### When should you see a health care provider?

If your pain is not getting better after 1-2 weeks, call for an appointment. Your provider may order special tests like an MRI or send you to a specialist.

You should be seen by a doctor or nurse immediately when:

- The pain is after a violent injury, like a car accident
- You lose control of your bladder or bowels
- You have unexplained fever with back pain

