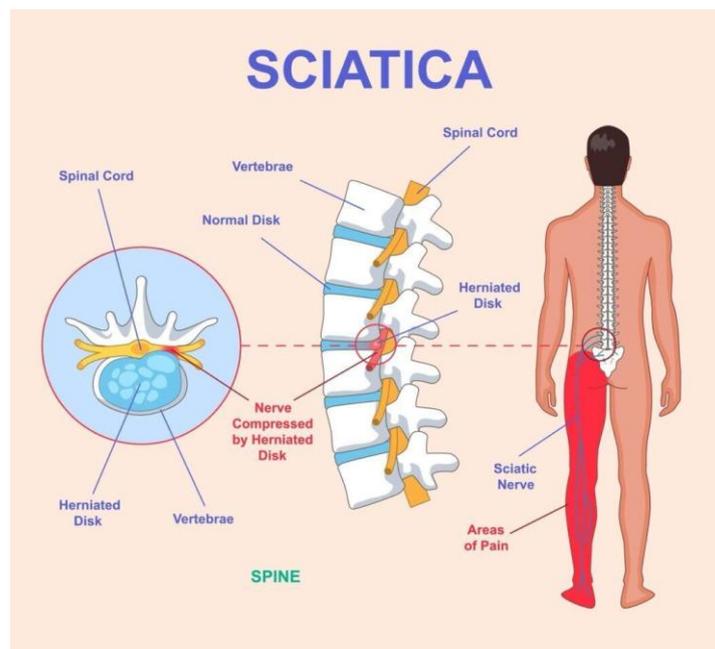


Sciatica



What is sciatica?

Sciatica is a term used to describe pain that travels along the path of the sciatic nerve. The sciatic nerve runs from the lower back, through the buttock, and down the back of the leg to the foot. Sciatica is a **symptom**, not a diagnosis.

What causes sciatica?

Sciatica happens when the sciatic nerve is irritated or compressed. Common causes include:

- A slipped or bulging disc in the lower back
- Age-related changes in the spine
- Muscle spasm or tightness in the buttock
- Inflammation around the nerve

- Less commonly, spinal narrowing (stenosis)

Common symptoms

Symptoms can vary from mild to severe and may include:

- Pain starting in the lower back or buttock and travelling down one leg
- Sharp, shooting, burning, or electric-like pain
- Tingling, pins and needles, or numbness in the leg or foot
- Muscle weakness in the leg (less common)
- Pain that may worsen with sitting, bending, or coughing

How is sciatica diagnosed?

Sciatica is usually diagnosed based on your symptoms and a physical examination. Scans such as MRI are not routinely needed unless symptoms are severe, worsening, or not improving.

What helps sciatica?

Most people improve with simple, conservative treatment.

Stay active

- Continue with normal activities as much as possible
- Avoid long periods of bed rest
- Gentle walking is encouraged

Pain relief

- Paracetamol may help manage pain
- Anti-inflammatory medication may be advised if suitable

Physiotherapy

- Advice on posture and activity modification
- Exercises to improve movement, strength, and flexibility
- Education to help you manage symptoms confidently

Heat or ice

- Heat can help relax muscles
- Ice may reduce pain and inflammation
- Use for 10–15 minutes at a time

Injections or surgery

- Rarely needed
- Considered only if pain is severe, long-lasting, or affecting daily function

Exercises

Gentle exercises can help reduce pain and improve recovery. A physiotherapist can advise which exercises are right for you.



What can I do to help recovery?

- Keep moving within comfort
- Avoid heavy lifting and twisting during flare-ups
- Use good posture when sitting and lifting
- Manage stress and sleep well

When should I seek urgent medical advice?

Seek **urgent medical help** if you develop:

- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Numbness around the genitals or anus (saddle numbness)
- Severe or worsening leg weakness
- Sudden, severe pain following a major injury

Outlook

Most people with sciatica improve over weeks to months. Staying active and following professional advice leads to the best recovery.
