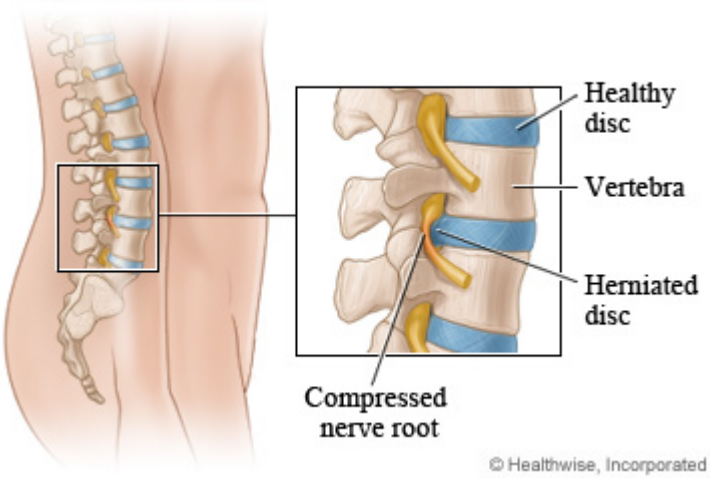
Sciatica: Care Instructions



Overview

Sciatica (say "sye-AT-ih-kuh") is an irritation of one of the sciatic nerves, which come from the spinal cord in the lower back. The sciatic nerves and their branches extend down through the buttock to the foot. Sciatica can develop when an injured disc or arthritis in the back irritates or presses against a spinal nerve root. Its main symptom is pain, numbness, or weakness that is often worse in the leg or foot than in the back.

Sciatica often will improve and go away with time. Early treatment usually includes medicines and exercises to relieve pain.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- Use heat or ice to relieve pain.
  - To apply heat, put a warm water bottle, heating pad set on low, or warm cloth on your back. Do not go to sleep with a heating pad on your skin.
  - To use ice, put ice or a cold pack on the area for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
- Avoid sitting if possible, unless it feels better than standing.
- Alternate lying down with short walks. Increase your walking distance as you are able to without making your symptoms worse.

- Do not do anything that makes your symptoms worse.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You are unable to move a leg at all.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new or worse symptoms in your legs or buttocks. Symptoms may include:
  - Numbness or tingling.
  - Weakness.
  - Pain.
- You lose bladder or bowel control.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You are not getting better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to https://www.healthwise.net/patiented

Enter **Z239** in the search box to learn more about **"Sciatica: Care Instructions".**

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