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Chiropractic: Treatment For Sciatica

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The sciatic nerves are the largest and longest nerves of the body, reaching about the size of your thumb in diameter, and extending from the low back into the buttocks, down the back of the thigh, splitting into two nerves in the back of the knee, then progressing into the lower leg and foot eventually ending in the toes.

When these nerves become irritated or inflamed, doctors refer to this as "sciatica." Each of the two sciatic nerves are formed by four or five smaller nerve roots branching off each side of the spinal cord and running down the back of each leg. The word sciatica literally means "leg pain" in Latin. Therefore, sciatica is a symptom and is not in itself a diagnosis.

Research indicates that most low back and associated leg pain is caused by mechanical problems in the alignment of one or more of the segments of the lower spine, which irritates or pinches the nerves as they exit the low

back (lumbar spine). In some cases there is no lower back pain, even when that may be the cause, but only leg pain. This is called referred pain.

A full blown sciatic flare-up can involve the entire sciatic nerve resulting in symptoms of lower back pain, burning, cramping, aching or numbness that radiates into the thighs, legs, ankles, and even the feet. Pain may also be limited to various points along the nerve, such as the hip, knee, and calf. Sciatica usually worsens with prolonged sitting or standing and with extended bed rest. Even strong pain killing drugs bring little or no relief and can cause other more serious problems to develop.

In the past, treatment has involved intensive drug therapy, physical therapy, and even spinal fusion. Currently, most medical authorities agree that in treating patients with low back and leg pain, conservative care should always be tried first. Chiropractic care has been shown to be safe, affordable and able to provide equal or better over all outcome measurements when compared to traditional medical care

and physical therapy. The chiropractic approach is to use a carefully directed and controlled pressure to relieve the pain and restore the normal alignment to the spinal vertebrae that are causing the sciatic symptoms.

Educating patients about their condition and the lifestyle changes that need to be made will help minimize the recurrence of this potentially disabling condition. Most patients report that they can resume their normal lives and their symptoms disappear without the use of drugs or surgery. Doctors of chiropractic attempt to find the source of these symptoms and correct the underlying cause.

More and more patients are seeking the natural approach offered by chiropractic before submitting to dangerous and irreversible surgery. The person with back problems like this is truly in need of appropriate evaluation and treatment; as a specialist in problems of the spine, nerves and muscles, the Doctor of Chiropractic is recognized as most qualified to deal with low back and sciatic leg pain.