

Optimal Health University™

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ADVANCED BACK & SPORTS INJURY CLINIC

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The Chiropractic Solution to Sciatica



Sciatica can be tricky and deceptive. Sciatic pain often alters between severe and constant to mild and intermittent; it can affect one leg, both, or switch from side to side; and it may even masquerade as low-back pain for months until more characteristic sciatic pain begins. But, fortunately, chiropractic sheds light on these sciatic "tricks". Although its source may appear deceiving, I find that the root cause of sciatica is usually in the spine.

The Sciatic Nerve is the longest nerve in the body. It runs from the pelvis through the hip area and buttocks and then courses down the back of each leg.

The term "sciatica" refers to the inflammation of this nerve and the pain that radiates along its course. Sciatica may feel like a leg cramp or as numbness, burning or a pins-and-needles sensation. Sciatic pain can also be excruciatingly piercing or stabbing. In one study of patients with chronic pain, sciatica sufferers endured "significantly higher" pain scores and limitations in daily living activities than any other group (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2002;25:162-7)

Although sciatic pain is generally in the legs, it is important to understand that the root cause is often compression of the sciatic nerve root, which is the beginning of the sciatic nerve as it exits the spinal cord in the low back.

Nerve root compression is frequently the result of one of two conditions: **vertebral subluxations** (misalignment of spinal bones) or **sacroiliac subluxations** (misalignment of pelvic bones). When the spinal or pelvic bones are even slightly out of place, spinal movement is restricted which in turn irritates the muscles, discs and the nerve root – causing pain.

Other causes of sciatic nerve compression include herniated spinal discs and piriformis syndrome (inflammation of the piriformis muscle in the buttocks). Often, more than one of these four causes occur simultaneously, so it is vital to identify and address all factors. The good news is that research shows that chiropractic care is effective at

alleviating all four of the common causes of sciatic pain. For instance, one study compared chiropractic care for sciatica to bed rest, massage, electrical muscle stimulation, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and a muscle relaxant. Patients in the chiropractic care group experienced significant reduction in the length of care, faster improvement from symptoms, less disability at work and fewer missed work days, compared with all other groups (*Ann Swiss Chiro Assoc* 1989;9:133)

Doctors of chiropractic correct both vertebral and sacroiliac subluxations with chiropractic adjustments. These maneuvers, which are safe and effective, successfully realign spinal and pelvic bones. Research shows that chiropractic adjustments are highly successful for sciatic pain associated with vertebral and sacroiliac subluxations.

One study consisted of 576 patients from different chiropractic clinics who suffered from sciatica. All subjects reported pain in the low back, legs or both. Researchers compiled statistics on the examination procedures, diagnoses types and results of care, number of days of care and the number of chiropractic adjustments to render "clinical improvement". Patients averaged 43 days to "attain maximum improvement" after an average of 19 chiropractic office visits (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 1984;7:1).

Another study enrolled 2,945 patients with sciatica and low-back pain, of which 268 patients suffered chronic low-back pain and radiating pain below the knee. Patients visited either one of 51 different chiropractic clinics or one of 14 general practice offices. Researchers assessed patients' satisfaction with care and low-back status via multiple questionnaires at various intervals. Also, at a one to three year follow-up, patients rated their self-management attitudes and behaviors. The subgroup of patient with chronic low-back pain and radiating pain below the knee "noted a long-term outcome advantage" for chiropractic vs. medical care.

The researchers found that chiropractic patients "were characterized by greater self-efficacy motivation." Over 55 percent of the chiropractic group employed strategies, such as exercise and self-care education, to reduce symptoms. The medical care cohort was far more likely to choose

bed rest and rely more on family friends for support during periods of back trouble. "The chiropractic encounter may have enhanced patients' self-



efficacy motivation, leading to better coping abilities and better pain and disability outcomes," concluded the researchers (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2001;24:543-51).

The piriformis muscles extend along both sides of the lower buttocks. Sciatic nerves travel beneath the piriformis muscle on their way from the spine to the back of each leg. Piriformis syndrome occurs when the muscle becomes inflamed, forcing pressure on the sciatic nerve and trapping it against the bones of the pelvis. Doctors of chiropractic often employ a variety of all-natural interventions for piriformis syndrome. The combination approach is highly effective.

What doesn't work? Unlike chiropractic care, research shows that traditional medical care for sciatica is not effective.

For instance, one study of 183 sciatica patients found that bed rest was no more effective than "watchful waiting." After 12 weeks, patients who were assigned to bed rest had no more improvement than those who were in a "watchful waiting" group. Researchers concluded that there was "no evidence that bed rest is an effective treatment for sciatica." (*NEMJ* 1999;340:418)

Another standard treatment involves masking the pain with continual doses of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as prescription painkillers or over-the-counter drugs like, aspirin, Advil, Motrin, and Aleve. Although these drugs may seem benign, overuse is linked to chronic headaches and migraines, gastrointestinal problems, heartburn and ulcers.

If you currently have back or leg pain, it is vital to avoid self-diagnosing. The origin may lie in the sciatic nerve root or may be related to another, unconnected to the sciatic nerve.

We are committed to identifying root causes of impediments to wellness, rather than masking symptoms with unnecessary medication or surgery. Pain is the body's way of signaling distress; let us help you pinpoint the cause.



DR. KEVIN L. STEWART takes pride in the 12 years he has offered skilled chiropractic care to his clients. His commitment to his patients and their health keeps him abreast of the latest technologies as well as advances in patient care. In accordance with his commitment to patient comfort, satisfaction and convenience, Stewart Chiropractic is open 5 days a week and provides emergency care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In treatment programs, prescribed gentle adjustments, advanced techniques, modern diagnostic, and therapeutic equipment are combined to attain optimum patient care