

Sciatica – when leg pain means something more

By Dr. Brent Wells
Better Health Pain and
Wellness Center

When your legs hurt, it is common sense to think the problem is in your legs. But sometimes pain in your legs is actually caused by a problem in your spine, a medical condition called "sciatica."

Sciatica is pain that travels along the sciatic nerve. This nerve, which is the largest in the human body, starts in the low back and runs down the hip, buttock, thigh, knee, calf and into the feet.

In addition to leg pain, people suffering from sciatica may experience leg weakness, low back pain and stiffness.

This condition occurs when

the nerves, usually in the lower back, are compressed. This compression can be caused by a number of low back conditions, including bulging or herniated discs, subluxations, degenerating discs, stenosis or spondylosis.

To understand sciatica and the conditions that cause it, it is helpful to know a little bit about how your body, and especially your spine, works.

Your spine is part of one of the most important and amazing body systems – the nervous system. The nervous system delivers messages from your brain to the rest of your body, giving you the ability to breathe, move, feel, see, smell, speak, etc.

This incredible system is made up of several parts, including your:

- Brain, which sends messages that control your body
- Spinal cord, which links your brain to the rest of your

body

- Spinal nerves, which extend out from the spinal cord and deliver your brain's messages to the rest of the body

- Spine, which is made up of moveable bones called vertebrae that protect the spinal cord and allow you to move freely

- And discs, which act as spacers and shock absorbers between each vertebrae.

Common spinal problems

There are a number of conditions that can occur in your spine, which can cause sciatica and other problems, including:

Subluxations. These occur when one or more vertebrae in your spine become "misaligned" or "stuck." They can be caused by an injury or just everyday activities, like sitting or standing for long periods of time. Subluxations can also occur in other joints, but most commonly in the spine.

Disc degeneration. In between each vertebra in your spine is a disc, which acts as a spacer and shock absorber. When healthy, these discs are flexible, like a wet sponge. But injuries or just aging can cause the discs to lose their fluid content and wear thin. This allows the vertebrae to rub together, becoming rough, worn down – or even fused together.

Bulging and herniated discs. The discs between your vertebrae have soft, gel-like centers surrounded by layers of fibrous tissues. Sometimes, due to an injury or just aging, the material in the middle of a disc pushes to one side or even ruptures. This is called a bulging or herniated disc.

Stenosis. As we age, ligaments in the spine can begin to thicken and harden. Bones and joints can enlarge and bone growths can develop on the vertebrae. This causes the spinal canal to narrow, placing pressure on the spinal cord.

Spondylosis. This refers to the bony growths on the vertebrae in the spine. This condition occurs in most people as they age, and is usually a result of disc degeneration that has been left untreated.

Advanced technology for pain treatment

The good news is that these conditions can all be treated and you can get back to living a healthy, active, pain-free life. There are a number of effective treatments available, all of which are available at Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers in Anchorage. Treatments include:

Chiropractic care. In 2003, approximately 30 million Americans sought care from chiropractic physicians – a number that has doubled over the past 15 years. With up to 15 percent of Americans suffering from low back pain right now, and up to 12 percent are suffering from neck pain, it's no wonder they are seeking relief from chiropractors, who are experts in caring for bones, nerves, muscles and tissues.

Benefits of chiropractic care include:

- Pain relief
- Reduced muscle spasms

- Slowed development of arthritis
- Increased mobility
- Improved posture
- Reduced chance of injury or re-injury

Chiropractic care has been the focus of many studies. Here are some interesting research findings:

- Chiropractic manipulations (adjustments) are one of the safest forms of treatment available. For example, it is estimated that one in 1 million manipulations could have serious side effects. Meanwhile, 2 million Americans will have severe problems due to prescription drug use in one year.

- Chiropractic patients have more long-term benefits, lower rates of re-injury and are less likely to be hospitalized. They are also more satisfied with their care.

- Chiropractic treatments for low back pain are more cost-effective than other medical care.
- About 90 percent of the 250,000 back surgeries performed each year could be avoided.

Physical/occupational therapy. A physical and occupational therapy program may include information on posture, suggestions for altering daily activities, and an exercise program incorporating both stretching and strengthening. This type of therapy is complementary to chiropractic and other treatments because it helps to maintain your improvements.

Other benefits of physical and occupational therapy include:

- Pain relief
- Increased muscle strength
- Reduced chance of re-injury
- Slower development of arthritis
- Increased flexibility
- Better overall body function

Massage therapy. Massage therapy is an effective tool, especially when used hand-in-hand with chiropractic care. Massage can alleviate pain and stress, improve circulation, speed recovery time, and improve overall body functioning.

DRS treatment. The DRS System, introduced to Alaska by Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers, is a highly effective, non-surgical disc decompression therapy for low back pain.

The DRS System provides many benefits including:

- Decreased low back pain
- Decreased leg pain or numbness
- Improved daily function
- Improved range of motion
- Shrinkage of disc herniation
- Distraction of worn-out joints or discs
- Long-term results

The DRS system, which was approved by the FDA in the mid-1990s, has been the focus of many studies. Research findings include:

- DRS treatment has been shown to help relieve low back pain in nearly nine out of 10 patients.

- Up to 86 percent of the DRS patients experienced "good" to "excellent" pain relief.

- There was up to 90 percent reduction in the size of patients'

disc herniations.

Many of Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers patients report significant results with DRS treatment: "The DRS really works! The pain in my right leg is gone!" says Gladys G; "The severe pain down my leg and around my knee greatly diminished, even though I had been told previously it was not related to the spine. Now I can stretch and move almost painlessly" agrees patient Carol F.

Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers

Dr. Brent Wells is a chiropractic physician and clinic director of Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers in Anchorage, Alaska.

Dr. Wells opened Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers in 1998, after seeing the need for a multidisciplinary clinic where patients could receive a

full range of effective, conservative treatments provided by an experienced, friendly staff in a comfortable, compassionate environment.

Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers offer a unique multi-disciplinary approach to treating sciatica, low back and neck pain, and other conditions. Dr. Wells and his talented and knowledgeable staff have treated thousands of Alaskans with notable results. They have also introduced many advanced technologies to Alaska, including the DRS System for low back pain and MCU Therapy for neck pain.

Better Health Pain and Wellness Centers are open 8am-7pm and have two convenient locations in Anchorage. If you are suffering from sciatica, low back pain or other conditions, call 907-346-5255 or learn more at www.bhpw.com.

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