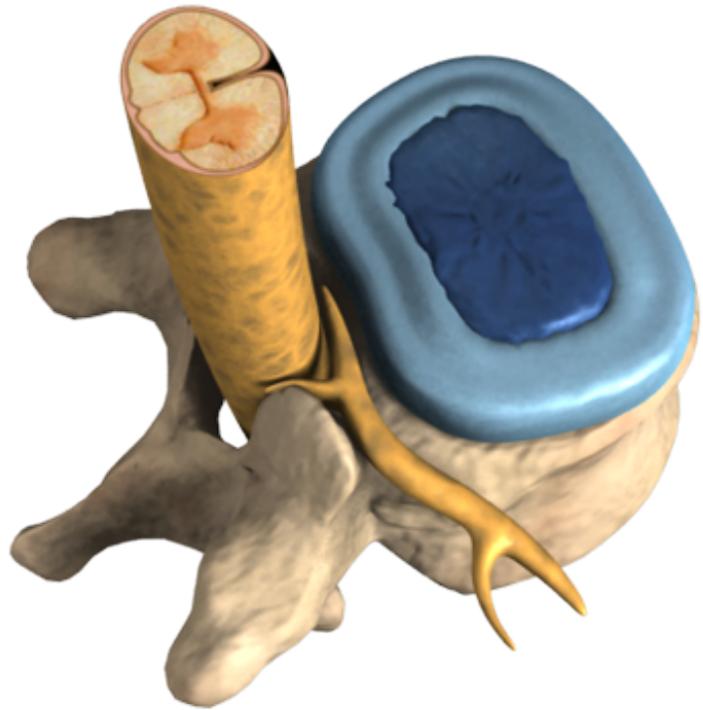
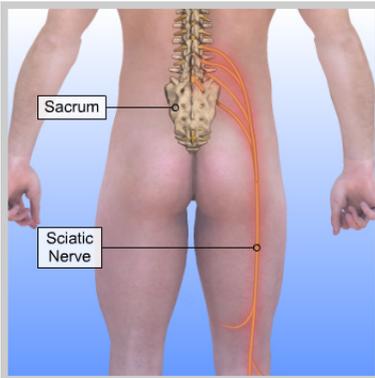


Sciatica

Sciatica describes an irritation of the sciatic nerve, which is the largest single nerve in the human body. The sciatic nerve begins from several nerves in the lower lumbar vertebrae and the sacrum at the bottom of the spine. These nerves combine to form the sciatic nerve, which travel through the buttocks and down each leg. Sciatic nerve irritation can result from compression of the sciatic nerve roots or from inflammation.





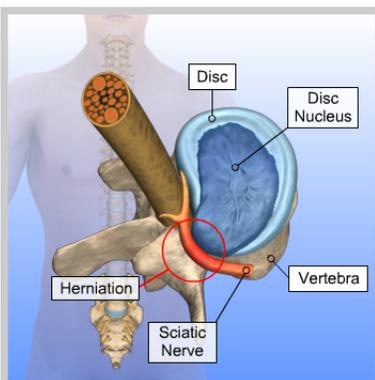
Introduction

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Symptoms

The primary symptom of sciatic nerve irritation is pain felt in the lower back or buttocks that travels down one leg, frequently to the foot. The pain can vary from a mild ache to a sharp, shooting pain and may sometimes feel like an electric jolt traveling down the leg. Muscular weakness, numbness or a tingling sensation down the leg and into the foot may also be symptoms. Pain in the leg is usually worse when sitting.



Causes

Sciatica can be caused by a variety of conditions that cause inflammation or pressure on the nerve roots connected to the sciatic nerve. The most frequent cause of sciatica is the degeneration and rupture of a lumbar disc due to the normal aging process. The ruptured disc may herniate and push against a nerve, causing pain in the low back, leg, or both. Occasionally, trauma or an episode of heavy lifting causes sudden rupture of the disc and symptoms. Sudden twisting, such as when golfing, can also cause herniations.



Summary

If symptoms include loss of bladder or bowel control, seek medical attention immediately. Minor sciatica will often disappear over time and it is rare for permanent nerve damage to result. If symptoms persist and worsen, or if they arise after a sudden injury, treatment may be necessary. Non-surgical treatments include controlling sources of inflammation and pressure, as well as physical therapy. Surgery is performed for those whose symptoms do not improve.