

Sciatica Overview - Bombay Spine Clinic

- Sciatica

What Is It?

- Sciatica refers to pain that radiates along the course of the sciatic nerve, typically from the lower back into the buttock and down the leg. It is a symptom rather than a diagnosis and is usually caused by irritation or compression of one or more spinal nerve roots in the lower back.
- The most common cause of sciatica is a lumbar slip disc, although other conditions such as lumbar canal stenosis, spondylolisthesis and spinal tumors can also cause similar symptoms.
- Sciatica can range from mild discomfort to severe, disabling leg pain that affects walking, sitting and daily activities.
- Common Symptoms
- Patients may experience:
 - Pain radiating from the lower back into the buttock and leg
 - Sharp, shooting or electric shock-like pain
 - Burning sensation in the leg
 - Tingling or numbness in the leg or foot
 - Weakness in the leg or foot
 - Difficulty standing or walking for prolonged periods
 - Pain aggravated by coughing, sneezing or straining
 - Pain while sitting for long periods
 - Typically, leg pain is more severe than back pain.

Causes & Risk Factors

- Common causes include:
 - Lumbar Slip Disc (most common)
 - Lumbar Canal Stenosis
 - Spondylolisthesis
 - Degenerative disc disease
 - Spinal tumors
 - Spinal infections
 - Rarely, piriformis syndrome
- Risk factors include:

- Age-related degeneration
- Prolonged sitting
- Heavy lifting
- Obesity
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Smoking
- Repetitive bending activities
- When Should You Seek Medical Advice?
- Medical evaluation is recommended if:
- Leg pain persists beyond a few days

Symptoms interfere with sleep or daily activities

- Pain is progressively worsening
- Numbness develops in the leg or foot
- Weakness develops in the foot or ankle
- Walking becomes difficult

Symptoms do not improve with rest or medications

- Seek Immediate Medical Attention If:
- Progressive weakness develops
- Foot drop occurs
- Severe numbness develops around the groin region
- Loss of bladder or bowel control occurs
- These symptoms may indicate severe nerve compression requiring urgent treatment.
- How Is It Diagnosed?
- Clinical Examination
- A detailed history and neurological examination help identify the affected nerve root and assess symptom severity.
- X-Ray
- May identify spinal degeneration, instability or alignment abnormalities.
- MRI
- MRI is the investigation of choice and helps identify:
- Slip disc
- Nerve compression
- Lumbar canal stenosis
- Other spinal pathologies
- CT Scan
- Occasionally used when MRI cannot be performed or additional bony detail is required.

- Blood Tests
- Rarely required unless infection or inflammatory conditions are suspected.

Treatment Options

- Non-Surgical Treatment
- Most patients improve without surgery.

Treatment may include:

- Activity modification
- Medications
- Physiotherapy
- Nerve mobilization exercises
- Core strengthening
- Posture correction
- Weight management
- Lifestyle modifications
- Many patients experience gradual improvement over weeks to months.
- Surgical Treatment
- Surgery may be considered when:
 - Severe pain persists despite adequate treatment
 - Progressive weakness develops
 - Foot drop occurs
 - Daily activities become significantly restricted
- Significant nerve compression is identified on MRI
- Common surgical options include:
 - Microdiscectomy
 - Endoscopic Discectomy
 - Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery
 - Lumbar Decompression Surgery
- The choice of procedure depends on the underlying cause and severity of nerve compression.

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. What is Sciatica?
- Sciatica refers to pain radiating down the leg due to irritation or compression of the sciatic nerve or its nerve roots.
- 2. Is Sciatica the same as a Slip Disc?
- No. Sciatica is a symptom, while a slip disc is one possible cause of sciatica.

- 3. Does every patient with Sciatica need surgery?
- No. Most patients improve with conservative treatment.
- 4. How long does Sciatica last?
- The duration varies, but many patients improve within weeks to a few months.
- 5. Can walking help Sciatica?
- In many cases, gentle walking is beneficial and promotes recovery.
- 6. Is bed rest helpful?
- Prolonged bed rest is generally discouraged as it may delay recovery.
- 7. What is Foot Drop?
- Foot drop is weakness of the muscles that lift the foot and may indicate significant nerve compression.
- 8. Can physiotherapy help?
- Yes. Physiotherapy often plays an important role in recovery and prevention of recurrence.
- 9. Can Sciatica recur?
- Yes. Symptoms may recur, particularly if underlying risk factors are not addressed.
- 10. When should I worry about Sciatica?
- Progressive weakness, foot drop, severe numbness or bladder/bowel symptoms require urgent medical attention.
- Related Conditions
- Slip Disc (Disc Herniation)
- Lumbar Canal Stenosis
- Spondylolisthesis
- Mechanical Low Back Pain (Lumbago)
- Peripheral Neuropathy
- Spinal Tumor
- When Should You Consult a Spine Specialist?
- If you have persistent leg pain, numbness, weakness or difficulty performing daily activities, a consultation with a spine specialist can help identify the cause and guide appropriate treatment.
- Early evaluation is particularly important if symptoms are severe, progressive or associated with neurological weakness.
- Need Expert Advice?
- Book a consultation with Dr. Siddharth Katkade or upload your MRI/report for review through our Patient Resource Centre.

Need Clinical Evaluation or Second Opinion?

This educational document was prepared by **Dr. Siddharth Katkade**. For appointments or to share MRI scan reports for clinical review, call **+91 88507 73095** or consult at Byculla (E) / Khar (W) clinics.