

# Sciatica and the Sciatic Nerve

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**Sciatica** commonly refers to pain that radiates along the sciatic nerve and is typically felt in the rear, down the back of the leg and possibly to the foot. Sciatica is one of the most common forms of pain caused by compression of the spinal nerves, and the **leg pain** often feels much worse than the back pain.

Sciatica is actually a *symptom* and not a diagnosis. The term literally means that a patient has pain down the leg resulting from compression of the sciatic nerve. The diagnosis is what is causing the compression (e.g. **herniated disc**).

The sciatic nerve is the largest single nerve in the human body; it runs from each side of the lower spine through deep in the rear and back of the thigh, and all the way down to the foot, connecting the spinal cord with the leg and foot muscles. Sciatic pain can occur when the nerve roots in the lower spine are irritated or compressed. Most often, sciatica pain is caused when the L5 or S1 nerve root in the lower spine is irritated by a herniated disc. When this happens, pain radiates into the rear and back of the thigh and calf, and occasionally may extend down to the foot. Numbness, tingling, and/or a burning or prickling sensation are also common sciatica symptoms.