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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

What is Sciatica?

Like it or not, 80% of us will experience an acute bout of low back pain at least once in our lives. Of those who get this back pain, many will also experience a mild to severe pain and/or numbness, called "sciatica", that often travels down one of your legs and potentially as far as your toes. To really understand what sciatica is and how it occurs, you need to first understand a little about the nerves exiting between the vertebrae of the spine.

The term "sciatica" comes from the name of the largest nerve in the entire body – the "sciatic nerve". The low back, called the lumbar spine, consists of five vertebrae. Between each of these vertebrae, a nerve exits from the spinal cord. These nerves eventually combine to form one large nerve, called the sciatic nerve. It is responsible for controlling many of the muscles in the leg. It also tells the brain when the leg is being touched or if it has been injured. Therefore, the sciatic nerve carries messages and instructions from the spinal cord to the entire leg and vice versa.

If one of the nerves of the spine that make up the sciatic nerve, or the sciatic nerve itself, is being irritated or pinched even slightly, problems arise. The messages and instructions passing to and from the leg will be weakened or interfered with. This may result in your leg, ankle or toes not being able to move with their normal strength and the skin possibly feeling numb when touched.

So, what does sciatica have to do with all this? Normally, the messages that travel back and forth between the brain and the leg are very calm and quiet. If there is a pinching or irritation of the nerves at the spine, these messages can become either highly amplified or weakened. In the case of sciatica, the calm and quiet messages that travel from the leg to the spine and brain become increased to that of a roar. This amplified message travels up the spinal cord to the brain. The brain assumes that this roar of a message is legitimate and that the leg is injured. This is why you feel mild to severe pain in your leg when there is really nothing wrong with it. Therefore, sciatica is really just mild to severe pain felt in the leg when one or more of the nerves in the low back are being irritated or pinched.

It is not difficult to determine if a person is experiencing sciatica or not. The real

challenge is determining where the pinching or irritation of the nerve is occurring. Only then can the actual cause of the sciatica be treated. This is something that chiropractors do in their office all day every day. In fact, no other health care practitioner cares for more patients with low back pain than chiropractors.