



UNDERSTAND THE CONDITION - KNOW THE NEXT STEP

Lumbar Radiculopathy (Sciatica)

Sciatica is pain that travels from the low back or buttock down the leg, usually because a lumbar nerve is pinched. It may cause sharp pain, numbness, tingling, or weakness. Most cases improve without surgery; persistent symptoms or progressive weakness require closer evaluation.

What you may feel

- Pain that travels from the low back or buttock down the leg, often past the knee.
- Sharp, electric, burning, numb, tingling, or weak sensations in the leg or foot.

How it is evaluated

- The symptom pattern, strength, sensation, reflexes, and nerve-tension signs help identify the involved nerve.
- MRI is most useful when it would change treatment and must be interpreted together with the examination.

How treatment typically progresses

1 Treatment usually starts without surgery

- Physical therapy, activity modification, and anti-inflammatory medication are commonly tried first.
- A targeted epidural injection may be considered when symptoms persist and imaging supports the plan.

2 When surgery enters the discussion

- Leg symptoms remain substantially limiting despite appropriate non-surgical care.
- Progressive weakness or a matching compressed nerve on MRI may change the timing of a surgical discussion.

Emergency: go now

- Seek emergency evaluation for new loss of bladder or bowel control, inability to urinate, numbness in the saddle area, or rapidly progressive leg weakness.

Contact the office promptly

- Contact the office for new or worsening leg weakness, fever with back pain, or rapidly worsening pain that limits walking.

Reviewed by Marc Greenberg, MD

Fellowship-trained orthopedic spine surgeon - 2026-07-13

Mayo Clinic (MD) · Johns Hopkins (residency) · Brown (fellowship)

This handout provides general education and does not diagnose a condition or replace individualized medical advice, examination, imaging review, or emergency care.



greenbergspinemd.com/sciatica/

FOR THIS VISIT

Your plan today

Your care team has checked the items below that apply to you. Keep this with you and bring it to your next visit.

**Medications
started today**

- ☐ muscle relaxant ☐ anti-inflammatory (ibuprofen/naproxen) ☐ acetaminophen (Tylenol)
☐ gabapentin / pregabalin ☐ steroid taper (Medrol) ☐ duloxetine ☐ other: _____

Imaging ordered

- ☐ MRI ☐ CT ☐ X-ray (flexion/extension) ☐ standing films ☐ CT myelogram

→ scheduling: ☐ you'll schedule ☐ our office / imaging center will call you

Other studies

- ☐ EMG / nerve conduction ☐ DEXA bone density ☐ vascular study (ABI) ☐ labs: _____

**Physical therapy
& activity**

- ☐ PT - convenient location; order sent ahead ☐ home exercise program
☐ activity restrictions: _____ ☐ assistive device (cane/walker) ☐ TENS unit

Bracing

- ☐ none needed ☐ lumbar (LSO) ☐ cervical collar ☐ as directed: _____

Injection

- ☐ Ordered - referral to a pain-management specialist → ☐ they will call you ☐ you will call them

Surgery

- ☐ To be scheduled - our surgical scheduler will call you. If you haven't heard within 5 business days, call (260) 484-1400.

**Before surgery
clearance & prep**

- clearance: ☐ primary care ☐ cardiology ☐ neurology ☐ pre-op labs ☐ smoking cessation
☐ stop blood thinners as directed

Referrals

- ☐ Bone Health Clinic (osteoporosis) ☐ weight / nutrition ☐ pain management (medication)
☐ other: _____

**Work / activity
status**

- ☐ work / school note ☐ off work until _____ ☐ modified duty ☐ FMLA / disability forms

Follow-up

in _____ weeks ☐ after your MRI / injection / EMG ☐ as needed

Notes & questions for your next visit
QUESTIONS OR NEW SYMPTOMS

Call us

Office · (260) 484-1400 · Scheduling · (260) 484-1400 · After hours · (260) 484-1400