

Leg and Back Pain: Relief

When you're suffering from leg and back pain, you have just one thing on your mind: pain relief. Sometimes, the first step to relieving the pain is in understanding the pain itself.

Most types of leg and back pain fall under two broad categories: chronic and acute. Acute pain, also called short-term pain, is very common. Approximately four out of every five American adults suffer from acute leg and back pain, with symptoms usually lasting from several days to a few weeks. The other type is chronic leg and back pain, which last for more than two months. This type of pain is often a symptom of another, more serious, underlying condition. If you suffer from chronic leg and back pain, it's important to see your doctor to determine the cause.

People can suffer from leg and back pain for a number of reasons. Two of the most common causes are sciatica and lumbar spine stenosis.

Lumbar Spine Stenosis

This degenerative disease of the lumbosacral spine affects up to 90 percent of the U.S. population, particularly those in the middle aged and elderly age groups. Lumbar spine stenosis causes disability, loss of productivity and morbidity.

Lumbar spine stenosis occurs when the cauda equina roots, a type of nerve found within the spine, become entrapped within the dural sac. This condition causes excruciating and incapacitating leg and back pain. This entrapment of the cauda equina roots is a result of the progressive hypertrophy of any of the osseocartilaginous and ligamentous elements, which are the soft tissues surrounding the spinal canal.

To further complicate the problem, these degenerative changes or trauma can rupture or herniate the intervertebral disc. This disc is composed of a gelatinous, centrally located nucleus pulposus and a peripherally located annulus fibrosus.

Lumbar stenosis mostly affects middle-aged to elderly men, although it has been known to occur in women and younger patients. Leg and back is the earliest symptom of the disease. Unfortunately, many patients choose to treat the pain with self-care methods, rather than consulting a physician or specialist, resulting in delayed diagnosis.

Sciatica

Sciatica is a condition affecting the sciatic nerve, caused by a herniated lumbar disc. The sciatic nerve travels from the lower back through the buttocks and into the leg, so the pain often occurs in any of these affected areas. Leg and back pain caused by sciatica can range from mild to severe.

The degeneration (herniation) of the lumbar disc causes it to compress onto one of the contributing roots of the sciatic nerve, causing sharp and 'shooting' leg and back pain. Pain in the leg, posterior thigh or foot can often be much worse than the accompanying lower back pain. At the onset, the patient will usually experience severe pain that originates in the buttocks and runs all the way down through the legs or foot. In some cases, there may be no accompanying back pain.

In order to effectively treat either of these causes of leg and back pain, it's essential to treat the disorders themselves. Typical self-help remedies, such as over-the-counter pain medications, offer little or no help. Detecting the disorder in the early stages can help in finding effective pain relief, so it's important to consult with your health care professional if you suffer from chronic leg and back pain.