

This leaflet explains what **low back related leg symptoms** are and gives advice on what to do about it.

Leg symptoms related with low back pain is often called **sciatica**. Sciatica gets its name from the sciatic nerve that goes down the back of each leg. The sciatic nerve is connected to the spinal nerves from the lower back. Not all low back leg symptoms are related to the sciatic nerve and that is why we choose not to call all these symptoms sciatica. When the spinal nerves are a cause of leg symptoms you may hear the medical term lumbar 'radicular' pain or 'radiculopathy'.

Where is it felt?

Low back related leg symptoms often cause **pain in one leg from your lower back and buttock to the back of the thigh**. In some cases we can feel pain, burning, tingling like pins and needles and or numbness down one or both legs and into the feet. Some people may feel weaker in their legs and feet.



How could it affect me?

The symptoms can be felt more by movements such as:

- Bending
- Walking
- Sitting
- Standing

Low back related leg symptoms can affect our ability to carry out daily activities, including work and hobbies. The symptoms can come and go. The symptoms can feel worse for a while after a particular activity. At times the pain can feel severe and for some be persistent. This can affect our general well-being and mental health.

Why does it happen?

Low back related leg symptoms can start because of an incident or increased physical demand (for example lifting) that often causes low back pain. It can also start for no obvious reason. Factors that may increase the risk of ongoing low back pain include obesity, smoking, educational status, stress, anxiety, depression, work issues and jobs that expose the body to vibration. It can affect

any of us at any age, but tends to be more common from our 30's to our 60's. Those who have experienced low back related leg symptoms are more likely to experience it again.

Low back related leg symptoms can be the result of problems with joints, ligaments, nerves or discs in your lower back and pelvis. The most common causes for a spinal nerve problem are the discs in the lower back and the aging features of the spine. Unlike the common term 'slipped disc', discs do not slip or come out. Medical terms such as bulging, prolapsed or herniated discs are used. Disc bulging and age related changes of the spine are normal for everybody.

However, due to a variety of reasons, some disc bulges may be different to others, and some spines age differently to others. At times these changes can irritate and sensitise the spinal nerves resulting in back and leg symptoms.

The severity and impact of symptoms are often due to a combination of:

- How we are made (muscles, joints and nerves)
- What we think (thoughts and feelings)
- How fit and healthy we are
- How we move
- What activities we do
- How we do our activities

Is it serious?

Based on the information you have provided, your physiotherapist believes you have low back related leg symptoms / sciatica that is **not** a medical concern. Low back related leg symptoms can sometimes be a sign of other medical conditions. In most cases x-rays are not advised for low back related leg symptoms. Scans are only useful in a small number of people with specific signs and symptoms.

If you are not improving or getting worse despite following the advice given, please contact us again.

Will it get better?

Most people will see an improvement in symptoms in the first 2 to 8 weeks. It can take 3 to 12 months before many feel they are getting back to normal and some people describe ongoing problems.

It is important to understand that to recover we must build back up our physical and mental health as best as we can. This can reduce the chance of having long-standing back and back related leg problems.

What can I do to help myself?

Continue to carry out the self-help advice on **managing your pain, modifying your activities** and gradually **building up your physical and mental health**. Introduce the further advice and exercises you receive from your physiotherapist. Exercises cause your body to adapt to activity. It's a gradual process. For them to work you will need to stick with them.

Consider the main factors affecting your situation and try to improve them.

- Learn more about low back pain and related leg symptoms
- Considering other pain medication options with a Pharmacist or GP
- Improve physical fitness through activity and exercise (see your exercise sheet)
- Improving your lifestyle (weight, smoking, alcohol, activity, stress)
- Improving your mental health and well-being

What can be done to help me?

Further physiotherapy assessment and treatment may be necessary if the advice provided does not help. Being actively involved in your health and well-being is still the most important part of recovery.

There are further options available to manage some low back related leg symptoms which can be discussed further with your physiotherapist.

There is a good chance that you will improve if you follow the advice you have been given. If you are not improving despite following the advice, please contact us again for further support.

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg