

## PIRIFORMIS SYNDROME

### What is piriformis syndrome?

Piriformis syndrome refers to irritation of the sciatic nerve as it passes through or next to the piriformis muscle located deep in the buttock. Inflammation of the sciatic nerve, called sciatica, causes pain in the back of the hip that can often travel down into the leg.

### How does it occur?

The piriformis muscle is located deep in the buttock and pelvis and allows you to rotate your thigh outward. The sciatic nerve travels from your back into your leg by passing through or next to the piriformis muscle. If the piriformis muscle is unusually tight or if it goes into spasm, the sciatic nerve can become inflamed or irritated. Piriformis syndrome may also be related to intense downhill running.

### What are the symptoms?

You have pain deep in your buttock that may feel like a burning pain. The pain usually travels down across your lower thigh. Your pain may increase when you move your thigh outward, such as when you are sitting cross-legged.

### How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will talk to you about when your symptoms began. Since your sciatic nerve begins in the back, it can be irritated from a back injury, such as a herniated disk. Your provider will ask if you have had any injuries to your back or hip. He or she will examine your back to see if the sciatic nerve is irritated there. He or she will examine your hip and legs and move them to see if movement causes increased pain.

Your healthcare provider may order X-rays, a computed tomography (CT) scan, or a magnetic resonance image (MRI) of your back to see if there is a back injury. There are no X-ray tests that can detect if the nerve is being irritated at the piriformis muscle.

### How is it treated?

Treatment may include:

- placing ice packs on your buttock for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for the first 2 to 3 days or until the pain goes away

- resting
- taking prescribed anti-inflammatory medicines or muscle relaxants (adults aged 65 years and older should not take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine for more than 7 days without their health-care provider's approval)
- learning and doing stretching exercises of the piriformis muscle

### When can I return to my sport or activity?

The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your sport or activity as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury, which could lead to permanent damage. Everyone recovers from injury at a different rate. Return to your sport or activity will be determined by how soon the nerve recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better.

You may safely return to your sport or activity when, starting from the top of the list and progressing to the end, each of the following is true:

- you have full range of motion in the affected leg compared to the unaffected leg
- you have full strength of the affected leg compared to the unaffected leg
- you can jog straight ahead without pain or limping
- you can sprint straight ahead without pain or limping

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