



Buttock and Leg Pain: Sciatica, Piriformis Syndrome or Ischiofemoral Impingement?

One-page summary of the full Spinemathema guide. Scan the QR code for the full guide, with references and audio.

Key points

- Buttock pain that spreads down the leg is often called sciatica, but the cause can be in the spine or deep in the buttock.
- Sciatica from the spine comes from an irritated nerve root in the lower back, most often a slipped disc or narrowing of the spine. Leg pain is usually worse than back pain.
- Piriformis syndrome, now often grouped under the name deep gluteal syndrome, is irritation of the sciatic nerve in the buttock. There is no single test for it and the research behind it is weak.
- Ischiofemoral impingement is a squeeze on a small muscle between the sitting bone and the top of the thigh bone. MRI is the main test.
- The right diagnosis matters because treatment aimed at the spine will not fix a problem in the buttock, and the other way round. Some people have more than one cause.

Go to A&E or call 999 if you have buttock, leg or back pain together with:

- Sciatica on both sides.
- Pain, tingling, weakness or numbness in both legs, especially if it is severe or getting worse.
- Numbness around or under your genitals, or around your bottom (anus).
- Difficulty starting to pee, being unable to pee, or not being able to control when you pee, when this is not normal for you.
- Not noticing when you need to poo, or not being able to control it, when this is not normal for you.
- Changes in how your genitals feel during sex, or new problems getting an erection or reaching orgasm.

These can be signs of cauda equina syndrome, which needs treatment in hospital as soon as possible. Do not drive yourself: ask someone to take you, or call 999 for an ambulance.

Not sure how urgent it is? Call NHS 111. More warning signs: spinemathema.com/warning-signs

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General information only, not personal medical advice.

If you are worried about your symptoms, contact your GP,

NHS 111, or in an emergency call 999.

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