

NEWTON WELLESLEY ORTHOPEDIC ASSOCIATES, INC.

RADICULITIS (Sciatica or Pinched Nerve)

Radiculitis refers to the symptoms caused by irritation or pressure on a nerve as it exits the spine. The symptoms can occur in the arms, if the nerve affected is in the cervical spine, or the legs, if the nerve is located in the low back. Patients can experience pain, numbness or tingling in a specific area of the extremity that corresponds to the affected nerve. Weakness in the arm or leg may also occur. Symptoms can be constant or may flare up periodically.

ANATOMY

The nerves that provide input to the muscles and skin of the arms and legs exit from the spinal canal through openings between the vertebrae of the neck or low back. Any condition that causes these openings to narrow and puts pressure on the nerve will cause the symptoms of radiculitis. The irritation can be caused by a bone spur or by a swollen or ruptured disc.

TREATMENT

Treatment is aimed at reducing the swelling and inflammation of the nerve. Once the nerve is no longer inflamed, the symptoms of radiculitis will resolve. Treatment options include:

- **NSAID** - non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications to reduce pain by decreasing swelling around the nerve. (Examples: Motrin, Ibuprophen, Aleve, Aspirin).
- **Physical Therapy** - can be helpful by using exercise to relax spasm and also to instruct patients in ways to avoid stressing their spine in the course of daily activity.
- **Steroids** - if there are no contraindications, a short course of oral steroids (Medrol Dosepak) can often decrease the inflammation rapidly, giving relief.
- **Epidural Steroid Injections** - may be helpful for patients that have not experienced relief with oral medications and/or physical therapy. Steroid is injected around the nerve and disc to decrease the inflammation.
- **Surgery** - most patients (%) will improve with conservative treatment, however, those patients who do not respond *and* who have findings of a disc or bone spur on MRI that corresponds to their pain distribution, may benefit from surgery.