

Health • GET ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Is It Sciatica?

You've been blaming your cursed sciatic nerve for ages, but is it really the root of your agony? Use our checklist to suss out the answer so you can leave that shooting leg pain far, far behind.

Your foot feels weak when you flex it.

When the sciatic nerve—which runs down the entire leg—is pinched, it can cause pain, weakness, and tingling. Having all these symptoms in one leg is a red flag.

You can't summon your pain with a push.

Use your thumb to firmly press the muscles in your lower back. If that makes your pain worse, you're probably achy from muscle tightness, not sciatica.

You find yourself sprinting to the bathroom.

Thankfully, this is extremely rare, but if a slipped or herniated disk is putting too much pressure on the sciatic nerve, it can rob you of control over your bowels and bladder.

If one or more ring true, it's likely sciatica. A doc will formally rule out osteoarthritis and muscle tightness, and plot your next move: painkillers, physical therapy, or even surgery.

Sources: Alan Hilibrand, MD, American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons; Eric Mayer, MD, Cleveland Clinic's Center for Spine Health; Jacob Teitelbaum, MD

