

• Interventional
Pain Management



NEWPORT NEWS OFFICE
Interventional Pain Management
732 Thimble Shoals Blvd.
Suite 803
Newport News, VA 23606
Phone (757) 933-8888



Rebecca Shoemaker

M.D.

Dr. Rebecca Shoemaker is fellowship-trained in physical medicine and rehabilitation and fellowship trained in Pain Medicine. Dr. Shoemaker is a member of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and the Association of Academic Physiatrists. Dr. Shoemaker specializes in physical medicine and rehabilitation and interventional pain management.

Is Your Shooting Pain Sciatica?

If you experience shooting pain down your leg, you aren't alone. Almost 40 percent of people experience sciatica pain at one point in life. The name comes from the sciatic nerve that runs from the lower spine into the leg.

But sciatica isn't the only cause of leg pain, says Rebecca Shoemaker, M.D., a pain medicine physician at Hampton Roads Orthopaedics Spine & Sports Medicine.

"If someone has a true sciatica, they have irritation of the nerve roots in their lower back," says Dr. Shoemaker. "If pain is coming from those nerve roots, a doctor can find signs indicating that during a physical exam."

At your appointment, your doctor will perform a physical exam to find the cause of your pain. During the exam, you may:

Bend Backward

If you bend backward and your pain flares up, it may be arthritis.

"Sometimes arthritis in the lower spine can mimic sciatica," says Dr. Shoemaker. "Usually that pain doesn't go past the knee, but occasionally it will."



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Sit in Different Positions

Pain while you're sitting may be a sign of piriformis syndrome. Sometimes the sciatic nerve runs through or over your piriformis muscle in your buttocks. The muscle can put pressure on the nerve and cause pain. Your doctor may have you sit in different positions or press on your piriformis to check for this condition.

Feel the Pressure

Your doctor may press on your back or hips to check for bursitis (irritation of fluid-filled sacs that cushion your bones, tendons, and muscles). Pelvic bursitis can

cause sciatica-like pain. If the sacs are irritated, you'll know it when your doctor presses on them.

Receive an Injection

Your sacroiliac joint connects your hips to your spine. If the joint moves too much, it can cause pain that mimics sciatica.

"There are many tests doctors can perform to determine if the sacroiliac joint is the source of pain," says Dr. Shoemaker, "but often the best test is a steroid injection."

If the injection relieves pain, you'll know the joint was the cause.

Lift Your Leg

When you are lying down, your doctor will pull up your leg while keeping it straight. This pain indicates you have sciatica.

Once your doctor knows the cause of your pain, he or she may prescribe treatment such as rest, physical therapy, pain relievers, or steroid injections. These treatments relieve shooting pains so you can get back to the activities you love.