SCIATICA by George William Smith

***Effect****:* Extends from the lower back to include the buttocks and legs. *The Sciatic nerve runs from your lower back through your buttocks through the back of your legs*.

***Symptoms****:* Initially, the pain may be a dull ache in the lower back, a buttock or the back of your thigh in the hamstring region and down to the calf as this area is serviced by your sciatic nerve. It may subside ***but always returns when you run***. Over a period of weeks, the pain becomes severe.

***Cause***: The constant jarring of running, often combined with flat feet or the opposite, high arches, knee problems or a leg-length discrepancy, causes irritation or damage to the sciatic nerve. ***Avoid hyperextension exercises (e.g. lying on the floor, belly down and raising the head and legs simultaneously)***. Sitting for too long may aggravate Sciatica as the jelly in the discs of the lower back gets pushed backward.

***Treatment***: If you have the symptoms of Sciatica, stop running. Use moist heat treatments on the tender areas or hot baths to lengthen the muscle tissue in the area. Do not return to running until the pain has subsided. Therapy is aimed at straightening the back and rotating the pelvis forward. Sits ups, sit up curls, leg raises, buttock tightening and tummy-tucking, stretch the hamstrings, massage the gluteals. When driving if you push lower back forward by placing a rolled up towel between your back and the seat, you will force the jelly in the discs of your lower back to compress and push the jelly forward relieving the sciatic nerve which runs nearby.

***Prevention***: **Make stretching a priority!** Keep your spine flexible by stretching your lower back muscles during warmup and cooldown. Strengthen your abdominal muscles through crunchies or bent-knee sit-ups, which work opposite the back. It is important to stretch the lower back and strengthen the opposite muscle groups to the lower back which are your mid-range and low-range abdominals. Crossed Leg Toe-touchers is a good exercise to stretch the piriformis muscle. The tightening of the piriformis muscle compresses the sciatic nerve, which aggravates the injury.

***Guilt***: **Do Not Feel Guilty about taking days off of running, especially if you return to running pain-free.** You cannot run through Sciatic Nerve problems. You must deal with the problems that caused it, first.

George William Smith, updated July 23, 2021 and thanks to Don Anderson for his helpful comments.