

Radiculopathy

TERMINOLOGY (SYNONYMS)

- Pinched nerve
- Compressed nerve
- Spinal nerve damage
- Sciatica

INTRODUCTION

The term radiculopathy refers to compromise of a spinal nerve root. There are many conditions that can compromise a spinal nerve. The signs and symptoms associated with a pinched spinal nerve (radiculopathy) include neck or back pain with spasms, numbness, radiating pain, and/or extremity weakness in the distribution of a nerve root.

The term radiculopathy refers to a disorder or disease involving a spinal nerve root or roots. The spinal nerve roots connect the nerves of the spinal cord with various areas of the body. Spinal nerve root compromise (radiculopathy) is often caused by direct compression of a nerve from a herniated disc or bony growth (bone spur/osteophyte). Degenerative disorders of the spine often contribute to the development of nerve root compression and resultant radiculopathy. It can occur anywhere in the spine where there are spinal nerve roots. This includes the neck (cervical spine), the mid back (thoracic spine) and low back (lumbar spine). Each spinal nerve connects with a specific skin region (dermatome), with specific muscles (myotome) and contributes to specific reflexes.

The spinal nerve roots are especially vulnerable to insult where they pass through openings (neuroforamen) along either side of the spine. Radiculopathy is characterized by radiating pain, numbness and/or weakness from any pathology involving the spinal roots or spinal nerve. The term radiculitis also means spinal nerve compromise but more specifically it is compromise associated with an inflammatory process, thus the use of the suffix "itis".

PREVALENCE

Radiculopathy occurs with equal prevalence in men and women. It is less often encountered in children or young adults. In the neck (cervical spine) radiculopathy occurs more often at the levels of C5-6 (C6 radiculopathy) or at C6-7 (C7 radiculopathy). In the low back (lumbar spine) it occurs most often at the level of L4-5 (L5 radiculopathy) and at L5-S1 (L5 and/or S1 radiculopathy).

