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Straight-Leg Test for Evaluating Low Back Pain

Topic Overview

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Straight-leg tests are done to help find the reason for low back and leg pain. To do this test, you lie on your back with both legs straight. Your health professional raises one of your legs upward, keeping the [knee](#) straight.

Your doctor may do this test on each leg. The test stretches the [sciatic nerve](#) that runs down the back of your leg and the nerve roots that lead to it.

- ✦ If you have pain down the back of your leg below the [knee](#) when your affected leg is raised, the test is positive (abnormal). It means that one or more of the nerve roots leading to your [sciatic nerve](#) may be compressed or irritated.
- ✦ If doing this test on the unaffected leg causes pain in the affected leg, it helps to confirm that one of these nerve roots is compressed or irritated.

Compression or irritation of the nerve roots leading to the sciatic nerve can have several causes, but the most common is a [herniated disc](#) at the lowest part of your back.

Recommended Related to Back Pain

Back Pain: Finding the Right Doctor

Start with your primary-care physician; back pain is so common that most family docs have seen lots of it. Your PCP is also a good person to return to if, later, you get conflicting treatment advice from specialists. He or she can help you evaluate what would be your best next step.

[Read the Back Pain: Finding the Right Doctor article >>](#)

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