

FACT SHEET — PERIPHERAL / REFERRED

Meralgia Paraesthetica

Burning, tingling, or numbness in the outer thigh — a nerve entrapment, not a spinal problem

Meralgia paraesthetica is caused by compression of the lateral femoral cutaneous nerve (LFCN) as it passes under or through the inguinal ligament near the hip. It produces a characteristic pattern of burning, tingling, or numbness in the outer thigh that is often mistaken for hip pathology or spinal nerve root compression. It is a peripheral nerve entrapment, not a spinal condition, and responds well to the right treatment.

Symptoms

- Burning, tingling, or numbness on the outer (lateral) surface of the thigh
- No back pain in most cases — the outer thigh symptoms are the primary complaint
- Symptoms typically do not extend below the knee
- Worse with standing, walking, or hip extension
- Often relieved by sitting or hip flexion
- May be aggravated by tight waistbands, belts, or clothing

Common causes and risk factors

- **Obesity** — increased abdominal girth increases compression at the inguinal ligament
- **Pregnancy** — increased abdominal size and altered pelvic mechanics
- **Tight clothing or belts** — direct external compression of the nerve
- **Prolonged sitting or desk work** — hip flexion compresses the nerve
- **Diabetes** — neuropathy increases vulnerability to nerve compression
- **Recent weight gain** — sudden increase in abdominal load

Treatment

Address contributing factors	Loose clothing, weight management, workstation adjustment, and avoiding prolonged hip flexion are often sufficient for mild cases.
Manual therapy	Soft tissue release of the inguinal area and hip flexors, and neural mobilisation techniques for the LFCN.
Local injection	An injection of local anaesthetic and steroid near the LFCN at the inguinal ligament is highly effective for persistent cases. Often provides lasting relief.
Surgery	Rarely required. Surgical decompression or nerve transection for severe, refractory cases.

Related fact sheets

Sciatica	Spinal nerve root pain — how to distinguish from meralgia paraesthetica.
Hip osteoarthritis	Hip pathology that can produce groin and thigh pain.
Back pain and diabetes	Diabetic neuropathy and its interaction with nerve entrapment.

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