

# Meralgia Paresthetica

## Thigh Numbness and Pain

By: Dr. Katharine Leppard



**T**here is numbness and tingling along the outside of the thigh – typically in a football-shaped pattern, that may or may not be painful. The numbness does not extend below the knee, you have no low back pain. What is happening?

This is the pinching of a small skin nerve with a long name. This nerve is the lateral femoral cutaneous nerve that is pinched as it passes by the front of the pelvis.

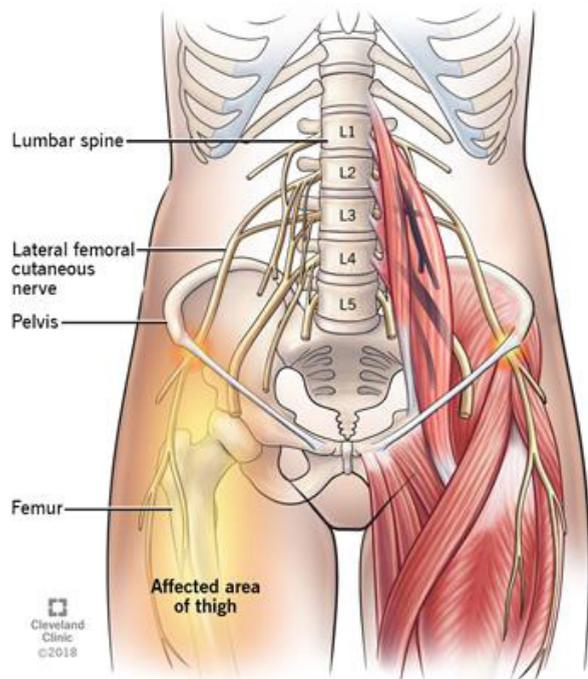
This condition is called meralgia paresthetica. It is also nicknamed "skinny pants syndrome" as tight pants can compress this nerve.

Diagnosis of this nerve is based on symptoms and the pattern of numbness. This small nerve cannot be seen on an MRI scan. This small nerve cannot be tested by an EMG study. The value of an EMG study is to rule out another explanation for the numbness. A lumbar MRI can be completed to make certain that there is not a pinched nerve in the low back.

The most common cause is being overweight with a belly that overlies the top of the pelvis. Wearing a belt that lays over the top of the pelvis can trigger irritation of this nerve as well. Tight garments, skinny pants, tool belts, and pregnancy can also trigger irritation of this nerve.

Compression of this nerve can be very painful. I see many nerve injuries in my office, and this one is typically one of the most frustrating and painful nerve issues. I have had patients tell me it feels as if a blowtorch is burning the side of their thigh.

This is a very annoying nerve injury. The good news is that it is not dangerous. This nerve supplies skin only, and injury will not cause weakness. The bad news is that we have limited treatment options.



## Treatment falls under several categories.

The most important treatment is weight-loss. Being overweight is a high-risk factor for this nerve being compressed.

Avoid constricting garments. In men, the most common culprit is a belt which lays low over the front of the hip. Switching to suspenders sometimes alleviates the numbness and pain. Avoid belts, avoid wearing a tool belt, avoid tight pants, avoid wearing girdles, or compression garments.

Ice, heat, and anti-inflammatories such as Aleve, Motrin, or Tylenol help some patients.

Nerve pain prescription medications can be used for severe pain. These include Neurontin (gabapentin), Lyrica (pregabalin), or Cymbalta (duloxetine). All these medications have the risk of grogginess. Lyrica, in particular, has a risk of swelling and weight gain.

Surgery is mentioned on the Internet. I am not aware of any surgeons in Colorado who operate on this nerve. The surgeons that I have spoken to about meralgia paresthetica say that the surgery has been largely abandoned. This nerve can be embedded in the skin and can be difficult to find, it can also have more than one branch, making finding and decompressing this nerve very difficult.

I have performed nerve blocks with a combination of a local anesthetic and steroids for this nerve over the years, and have discontinued these injections. I have not found injections to be of benefit.

Most commonly this condition will resolve with the passage of time. This nerve injury can also be a permanent injury. I had one gentleman who wore a tight cummerbund one night only to a function, and had permanent pain and numbness

This is truly one of the most frustrating nerve issues, both for patients due to the level of irritation and frequent pain, and for doctors, given the limited treatment options available.

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