

SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON SCIATICA

What is Sciatica?

Sciatica refers to pain, tingling, or numbness caused by irritation or inflammation of the nerve roots that form the sciatic nerve. The sciatic nerve originates in the lower back, runs through the buttocks, and extends down the back of the leg to the foot. Most cases are due to compression or irritation of the nerve, often caused by age-related spinal changes or a disc injury.

Common Causes & Risk Factors

- **Younger individuals:** Often due to injury or bulging of the intervertebral discs.
- **Older individuals:** Can be caused by thickening of spinal tissues and age-related changes.
- **Lifestyle & health factors:**
 - Being overweight
 - Smoking
 - Lack of fitness or mobility
 - Emotional distress and anxiety (can amplify pain perception)

Symptoms of Sciatica

- Pain radiating from the lower back down the leg
- Numbness, tingling, or weakness in the affected leg
- Symptoms often worsen with prolonged sitting or certain movements



How Long Does It Last?

Most cases improve within **6 to 12 weeks**, though some people may experience persistent symptoms for longer.

Managing Sciatica at Home

Sciatica is rarely serious, and most people recover without medical intervention. Here are ways to manage symptoms effectively:

1. Stay Active

- Avoid prolonged sitting—stand and move every 30–60 minutes.
- Continue normal activities as much as possible.
- Engage in gentle exercise (walking, swimming, or stretching) to maintain mobility.

2. Pain Relief

- **NSAIDs (e.g., ibuprofen)** are the first-line option; take the lowest effective dose for the shortest time.
- **Paracetamol alone is not recommended.**
- Pain relief may not eliminate pain but can help maintain function.
- Speak to a pharmacist or GP for advice on pain management.

3. Do I Need an MRI?

Most people with sciatica do **not** need an MRI or X-ray. Scans are only useful in specific cases, e.g.:

- When a doctor suspects a serious spinal condition (e.g., infection, tumour, or Cauda Equina Syndrome).
- If symptoms persist despite treatment and further intervention (e.g., injections or surgery) is being considered.
- **Important:** Many people have age-related changes visible on MRI that do not cause pain, so scanning often does not change treatment.

4. Heat & Cold Therapy

- Apply a **heat pack** or **cold pack** (wrapped in a damp towel) to the painful area for **10–15 minutes**.
- Repeat as needed, ensuring the skin returns to normal temperature between applications.

5. Modify Activities

- Break tasks into smaller, manageable parts.
- Avoid pushing through severe pain—gradual movement is key.
- Change sleeping positions if pain worsens at night.
- Use a walking aid if needed to maintain balance and reduce discomfort.

6. Consider Lifestyle Changes

- **Weight loss** can reduce spinal stress and improve symptoms.
- **Smoking cessation** may help reduce chronic pain severity.

Exercises for Sciatica Relief

Exercise can help reduce pain and improve mobility. Start gently and increase as tolerated. Perform each exercise set **1–2 times per day**. Start with a few repetitions and increase as you feel able.

1. Piriformis Super Stretch



Hold 3-5 sec; repeat 5-8 times; perform at least once per day.

Sit or lie down, cross one ankle over the opposite knee, and gently pull your knee toward your chest.

2. Lying Glute Stretch



Hold for 3-5 sec, repeat 5-8 times; both sides; perform at least once per day.

Begin lying on your back, cross one leg over the opposite knee, and slowly bring the foot that is still on the floor up toward your chest.

3. Hip Flexor Exercise



Repeat 10-15 times on both sides; Perform at least once per day...

Stand with one foot forward, bend the back knee towards the ground, keeping the front knee above the ankle.

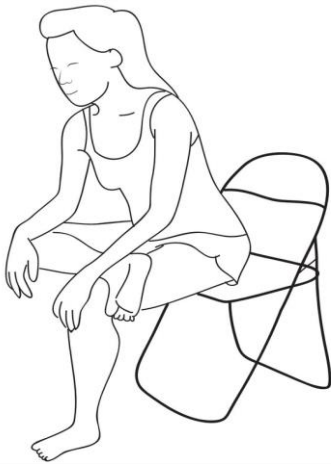
4. Lying Outer Hip Stretch



Hold 3-5 sec; repeat 5-8 times; perform at least once per day.

Begin lying on your back, cross one leg over the opposite knee, and slowly bring the foot that is still on the floor up toward your chest.

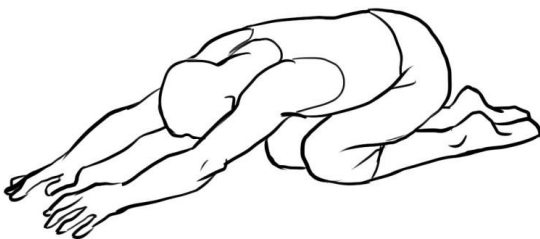
5. Seated Figure Four Stretch



Hold for 3-5 sec, repeat 5-8 times; perform at least once per day.

Sit with one ankle over the opposite knee, stabilise with both hands, and gently press down on the knee while leaning forward.

6. Child's Pose



Hold for 3-5 sec, repeat 5-8 times; perform at least once per day.

Kneel, lower your body forward, stretching arms in front.

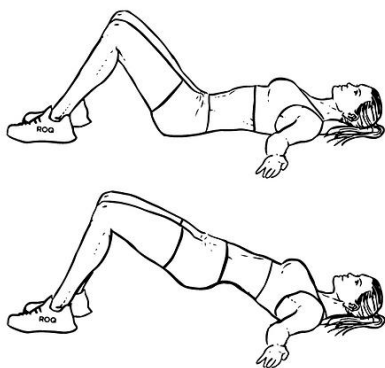
7. Knee Rolls



Hold for 30 sec, 3–5 sets; perform at least once per day.

Lie on your back with knees bent. Gently roll knees to one side, hold for 5 sec, return to centre, and switch sides.

8. Bridge Exercise



Hold for 5 sec, 3–5 sets. Perform at least once a day.

Lie on your back, knees bent. Tighten core, lift hips, and lower slowly.

9. Marching on the Spot.



Hold for 30 sec, 3 sets.

Stand and march in place, lifting knees comfortably.

Movement should be **comfortable, not painful**. Some discomfort is normal, but pain should ease within 20–30 minutes after exercise.

When to Seek Further Help

See your **GP or physiotherapist** if:

- Pain is worsening and not manageable with self-care.
- You experience **muscle weakness** in one or both legs.
- Sciatica persists beyond **12 weeks** despite self-management.

When to Seek Urgent Medical Attention (A&E)

Although rare, sciatica can sometimes be caused by **Cauda Equina Syndrome (CES)**, a serious condition requiring emergency care.

Seek urgent help if you experience any of the following:

- **Difficulty passing urine or incontinence.**
- **Numbness or tingling in the genital area, buttocks, or back passage.**
- **Loss of sensation when passing urine or during bowel movements.**
- **Loss of sexual function (e.g., inability to achieve an erection or sensation loss during intercourse).**

If you have any of these symptoms, go to **A&E immediately or call NHS 111.**

Final Notes

This leaflet provides general advice for managing sciatica. If your symptoms persist or worsen, seek professional advice. Staying active and maintaining a healthy lifestyle can help you recover faster and prevent future episodes.

Useful Contacts & Further Support

- **Ask your pharmacist** for pain relief advice.
- **Patient UK:** www.patient.co.uk
- **NHS Sciatica Information:** www.nhs.uk/conditions/sciatica

If you need further advice, please fill out the **triage form on our website** before calling the practice at **01285 653184 or 01285 653122.**

For urgent medical advice, call **NHS 111**. In an emergency, call **999**.