

What is Sciatica?

Sciatica refers to pain that runs from the back or buttock down the back of the leg, sometimes as far as the foot. You may also feel tingling or numbness in your leg or foot.

You may have some associated back pain but this is not usually as bad as the pain in your leg.

Causes of Sciatica

Sciatica is caused when the sciatic nerve becomes irritated or inflamed. This can occur for a number of reasons but is rarely serious.

Diagnosis of sciatica is based on your symptoms and assessment findings.

In most cases an MRI scan is not necessary and would not change how your symptoms are managed.

How to help your pain

- In most cases sciatica will resolve in 6-12 weeks but may last longer.
- Try to keep active and continue with your normal activities as much as possible.
- Avoid sitting or lying for long periods during the day. Even if moving hurts it's not harmful and will help you get better quicker.
- Start gentle exercise as soon as you can. Any exercise that gets you moving is good, so try to do something you enjoy. Remember to practise regularly and gradually increase the amount you do.
- Take pain relief if necessary to help you continue with your usual activities. Speak to a Pharmacist for further advice. Sometimes if your leg pain is severe, your GP may prescribe some nerve pain modulating medication that may help.

When to seek urgent medical attention (A&E):

Although very rare if you experience any of the following symptoms you must seek urgent medical attention

- **Difficulty passing urine**
- **Numbness or tingling in your genital region, back passage or buttocks**
- **Loss of control of your bladder or bowel Impaired sexual function; such as loss of feeling during intercourse or a change in ability to achieve an erection**
- **Loss of sensation when passing urine or during a bowel movement**

If you experience any of the following, please consult your GP or Physiotherapist:-

- Your leg pain is worsening and not manageable
- You experience muscle weakness in one or both legs which affects your walking
- You develop pain, numbness or pins and needles into both legs

Remember general exercise is the most helpful way to ease your symptoms. However, sometimes doing some simple stretching exercises can help you feel more confident to move.

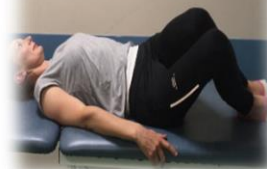
Start with a few repetitions and increase as you feel able. You could try repeating the exercises 3-4 x a day or as often as you feel beneficial.



On your hands and knees, alternate between arching and hollowing your back.



Mini knee bends trying to keep your weight even over both feet, keep your back relaxed as you move.



Hip twist

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet together. Roll knees to one side then repeat to the opposite side.

References:

- Finucan L, Downie A et al (2020) International Framework for Red Flags for Potential Serious Spinal Pathologies; JOSPT(Ahead of Print)
- Jesson T (2018) Radiculopathy, radicular pain and referred pain: what are we really talking about; In Touch; 164; 16-21
- Low back pain and Sciatica in over 16s: assessment and management NICE guideline: 30 November 2019
- Ostelo R (2020) Physiotherapy Management of Sciatica; Journal of Physiotherapy; 66 (2) 83-88

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