

SCIATICA PAIN RELIEF

THE GUIDE FOR SCIATICA RELIEF
INCLUDING STRETCHES, EXERCISES
AND RECOVERY TIMELINE



REVISION HEALTH SERVICES

CONCIERGE PHYSICAL THERAPY AND WELLNESS

WHAT'S INCLUDED

This PDF is a great guide to help you improve from sciatica and understand what it takes to recover. Sciatica often improves, but knowing what to do and when can be extremely helpful during recovery. Not only will this guide help you feel better, but it will give you confidence along the way.

Now, it's recommended that you consult a movement professional near you to help you in your recovery journey. There is no substitution for a detailed physical examination to assist in the nuances of sciatica relief.

The recovery guidelines will help you understand the nerve-healing process and what that feels like. The goal is to help you have more confidence and less limitation as your body heals.

Highlights include:

- Tips for sciatica relief.
- 3-stage recovery process with timeline, common treatments, and exercises.
- 17+ Exercises to support nerve healing and strengthening around the nerve to assist in recovery and prevention. The exercises include detailed descriptions, dosage, and tips!

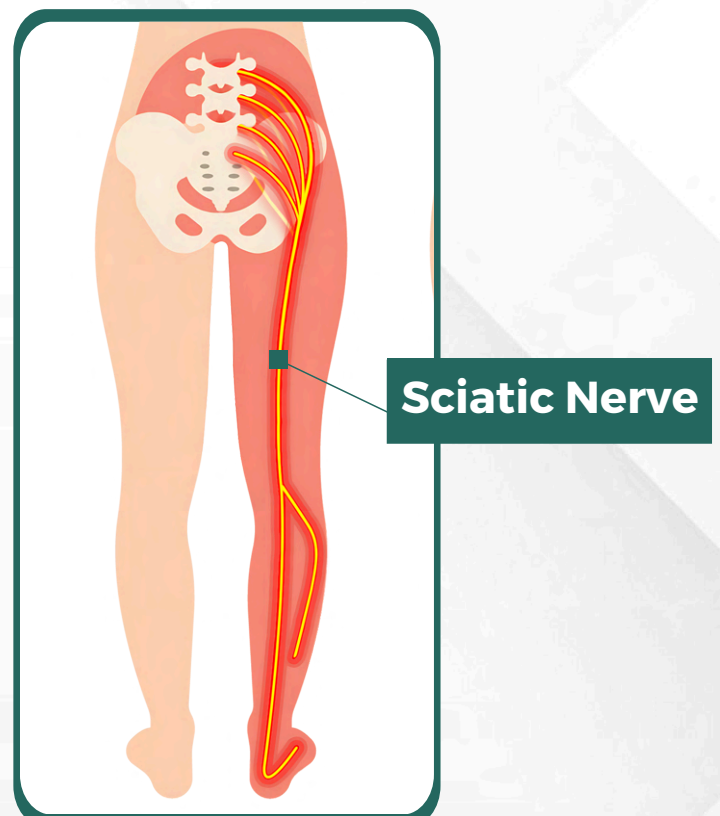
DISCLAIMER

This guide utilizes experience and evidence to guide appropriate education for those with injury or illness. We are not responsible for injury or personal harm that may result from information found in this PDF or related material because the information displayed does not represent every person's potential injury or condition due to the variability between individuals. Providing a diagnosis, prognosis, and intervention without a comprehensive evaluation by the appropriate medical professional is impossible. Therefore, any advice or information provided for a particular injury or condition can not be considered appropriate and applicable without a legitimate medical examination. The risk for injury is possible if precautions are not taken and one does not seek professional medical assessment about their injury or condition. No guarantees about results are expressly made or suggested in this PDF.

WHAT IS SCIATICA?

The main characteristics of sciatica are nerve pain down the leg, numbness and tingling, and weakness in the leg or foot. It may or may not cause lower back pain.

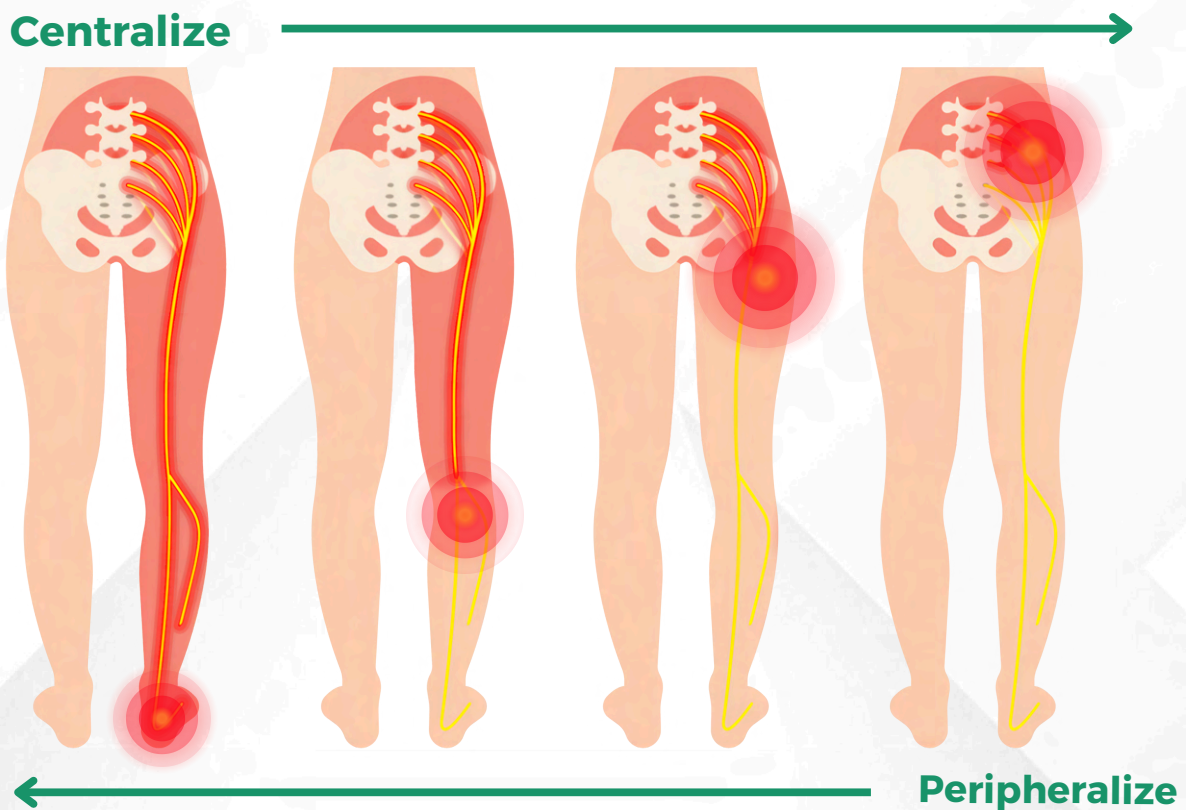
Sciatica's main quality is burning leg pain and high levels of pain related to spine movement such as bending over or sitting.



GUIDELINES FOR RECOVERY

1. CENTRALIZE VS. PERIPHERALIZE

At no time should you have an increase in symptoms in your leg or foot. Symptoms including tingling, pain, and numbness should start working their way back toward the spine. For example, they may start in your foot and as you recover you feel it reduced in the foot but feel symptoms in the calf or hamstring. As things make their way back to the spine, that is a good thing!



2. IRRITABILITY

This is key! Soreness is expected but increased lingering pain must be avoided. It's okay to be sore for a few minutes but if anything makes you experience higher levels of pain for 24-48 hours, that's too much. In those cases, it's best to reduce the reps, sets, or intensity of the exercise.

3. PROGRESSIONS

Pain improves first, then strength and numbness. Nerves take a little longer to recover.

TIPS FOR SCIATICA PAIN RELIEF

SITTING CAN INCREASE SCIATICA PAIN

Sitting in general can cause pain but sitting on a soft couch can cause extra discomfort! Try standing or sitting on a harder surface.

AN MRI MAY NOT BE NECESSARY FOR SCIATICA

I see this all the time! In nearly all cases you don't need an MRI and the research would agree. Having an MRI can complicate things. I know you feel that you want to know what is going but trust me, it can really muddy the waters. Most doctors will order it if you ask them but that doesn't mean it's necessary. A physical exam will determine if you need an MRI. That said, if you have progressive muscle weakness, pain longer than 3 months, loss control of your bowel or bladder, or numbness in your groin then those would be great reasons for an MRI.

STAY POSITIVE

Positivity goes a long way. It can be hard to remain positive when you are in a lot of discomfort but remember nearly everyone gets better and you can trust your body to recover.

HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Yes, even herniations can improve over time! It can take a few months to completely recover. Some longer and some drastically shorter. It's hard to 100% confidently predict but that recovery process can be so much more enjoyable if you reach out to a PT or a movement professional to help you.

CONSIDERING INJECTIONS?

In severe cases, I have seen injections help calm down nerve pain. They are often not needed, costly, and can be risky but in the right case they can be really useful. It's one of those things we start talking about if you have had ZERO improvement in a couple months.

WHAT ABOUT MEDICATIONS?

There can be a variety of medications that can be helpful through this process including anti-inflammatories such as Meloxicam or Ibuprofen. I have also seen muscle relaxers such as Flexeril help with spasms.

3 THINGS THAT MAKE SCIATICA WORSE

- Laying around and not walking or moving
- Bending over a lot or sitting on a soft couch
- Picking heavy objects up before you are ready

3 STAGE PROGRESSION

OF EXERCISES, STRETCHES AND RECOVERY

STAGE 1 HOT AND HEAVY: 1 DAY TO 2 WEEKS

- This is the stage where things are not great. Movement can be very painful and nearly everything is challenging.
- Common to have leg pain or shooting pain in the leg, calf, or even foot.
- You may or may NOT have back pain!
- Bending over; forget about it. Bending over, sitting, and even putting your shoes on is flexion of the spine, which is often the most painful when you have sciatica.
- Trust your body to heal. There are medications to help with symptoms but they don't help with the cause.
- Common treatments include rest, anti-inflammatories, muscle relaxers (but it's not muscle that is the issue, physical therapy, heat, and modalities such as massage gun.
- Don't worry about trying to get an MRI right now, unless you have numbness in your groin area, loss of ability to urinate, progressive weakness in your leg.

STAGE 2 CALMING DOWN: 1-2 WEEK AND BEYOND

Things are calming down and you notice either improvement in pain, numbness, or tingling. You are now able to move about your home and have started feeling a little more confident in your recovery. This may be a time to consult a physical therapist or physio but some people choose to continue on their own. It's time to start using movement as medicine.

3 Rules for Exercise:

- 1. The pain should not peripheralize.** That is, any movement you do should not increase pain in the leg, calf, or foot. If it does, then hold off.
- 2. Exercise should not cause pain!** You may have some soreness with the movement but it should not last more than 24 hours.
- 3. Exercise should never make you worse.** All of the techniques listed are relieving. In that, they should never make you feel WORSE. If they do, then you should stop.

SCIATICA PAIN RELIEF PHYSICAL THERAPY EXERCISES AND STRETCHES

WALKING IS KEY! PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT EXERCISE

- 10-15 min at least once a day
 - This reduces inflammation, reduces pain, and provides an environment for the nerve to heal.

STAGE 2 STRENGTHENING

BRIDGES



Lay on your back and have your knees spread apart. Make sure your head is supported and that you are comfortable. Then tighten your glutes and lift your hips as high as you can. Make sure to focus on the movement and move in a slower controlled manner.

TIP

You can change the distance between your heels and buttocks to feel different muscles working. Try a few different distances and find the one that feels good for you!

DOSAGE

2-3 sets of 15 repetitions

BRIDGE WITH CLAM SHELLS



Same as the bridge, but a band will be at your knees. The band must be a loop, and before you lift, make sure to apply tension by spreading your knees. Lift your hips, then open and close your knees. You should feel your hips working. Don't go too fast, and make sure you achieve good tension in the band.

TIP

Keep your hips lifted and spread your knees more to feel a greater burn! If you feel any back pain or tingling into your leg you should stop.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 20 repetitions

STAGE 2 SCIATICA PAIN RELIEF STRETCHES

90/90 NERVE STRETCH



Lay on your back and make sure your head is supported and that you are comfortable. Then take the leg that is experiencing burning or tingling and grab behind that knee using both hands. From there, start to straighten the leg until you feel tension in the back of your leg. Straighten your leg and as the tension builds you will feel a bigger pull in the back of your leg. Stop when you feel a good stretch and then relax.

TIP

Make sure the other leg stays straight! You want to stop just before you have increased tingling or pain. Only hold the stretch for 1 second!

DOSAGE

2 sets of 20 repetitions

GLUTE STRETCH



Lay on your back and bend the leg you want to stretch. Grab the outer knee and pull towards your other shoulder. You should feel a stretch in your buttocks.

Make sure the other leg is straight.

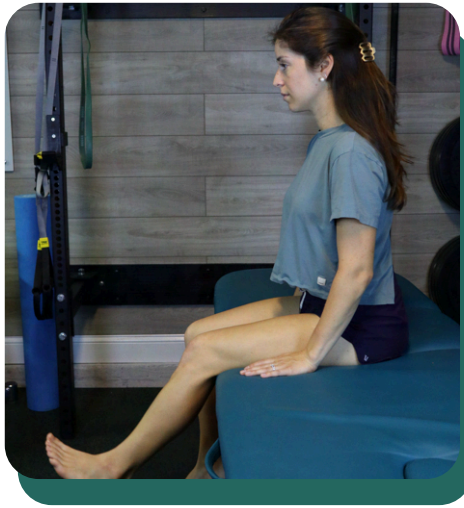
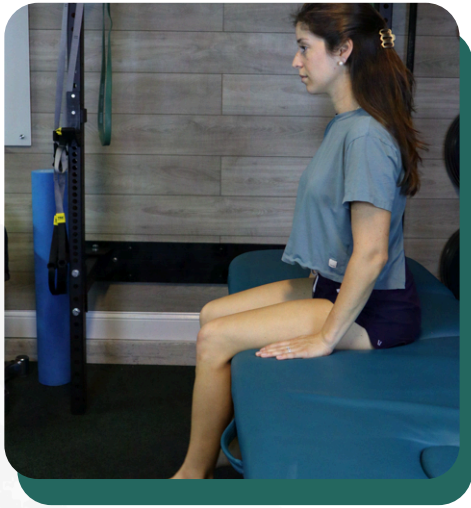
TIP

If you feel a pinch in your groin, change the angle in which you pull. You may pull towards the other hip vs the shoulder.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 20 repetitions

SEATED NERVE STRETCH OR GLIDE



You will be sitting in a chair with your knees against the edge. Then begin to kick out the leg that you are experiencing symptoms. Make sure you are in good tall posture when you kick the leg out. Stop when you feel tension or tingling into the leg or foot. Only hold this stretch for 0.5 seconds.

TIP

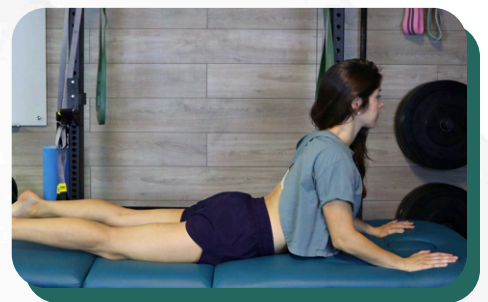
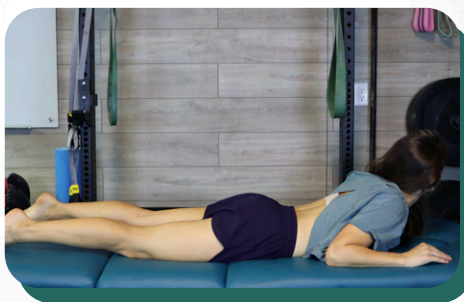
The more you slouch the greater the pull in the leg. You do NOT want to have lingering symptoms after you complete this. If you do, that means you stretched the nerve too much or for too long. Listen to your body. It's normal to have some tingling in the foot when you do this.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 20 repetitions

STAGE 2 SPINE MOBILITY

PRONE PRESS



Lay on your belly and make sure you keep your hips relaxed. Place your hands just above your shoulders and slightly out. Then, apply pressure through your hands and press your body off the ground while keeping your hips on the ground. Press up until you feel very little pressure in your lower back. It's okay if you can't press very far.

TIP

The more you keep your hips and glutes relaxed the better. It's okay to start with a limited range of motion.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 10 repetitions

STAGE 3 RETURNING TO YOUR NORMAL

You may still have some slight symptoms, including pain, tingling, and numbness, but for the most part, you can do what you need to do in your day. You are generally sore. This stage can last a week to a couple of months. The key is to remain consistent, and if you are ever in doubt, just consult your local physio. They will be able to guide you through this process.

1. WALKING IS KEY! PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT EXERCISE

- 15 min/ twice a day

Stage 3 Nerve Slides or Nerve Stretches

SUPINE SCIATIC NERVE GLIDE OR STRAIGHT LEG RAISE



Lay on our back with one foot in a strap. You will use your arms to lift your leg. The strap must be around the ball of your foot, not the arch. Then, as you lift your leg, you will keep it completely straight or locked out. You will feel a big stretch, and that is when you stop. This is intended to stretch and glide your sciatic nerve, so the stretch may be intense at first. It will feel better as you go.

TIP

It's important to use your leg muscles to lift your leg. Your leg must be relaxed to stretch the nerve.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 20 repetitions

STANDING SCIATIC NERVE GLIDE



You will stand on one leg while you are holding onto something sturdy. As you stand tall, you will swing one leg back and forth through a comfortable range. When your leg is out in front of you, you are stretching the nerve, so that is when you will feel it the most.

TIP

Try to use momentum and go at a faster speed than you think. The taller you stand the more you will feel it.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 20-30 repetitions

SEATED



You will be sitting in a chair with your knees against the edge. Then, begin to kick out the leg that you are experiencing symptoms. Make sure you are in a good, tall posture when you kick the leg out. Stop when you feel tension or tingling in the leg or foot. Then, hold that position and pull your toes back. You will feel a stronger pull. That's the nerve you feel.

TIP

You can do this multiple times during the day and it should feel better as you go. If it doesn't then try to complete the stretch with less intensity.

DOSAGE

1 set of 20 repetitions

STAGE 3 STRENGTHENING

It's important to start strengthening and regaining normal movement patterns for your body and nerves. Your sciatic nerve moves with every movement you make, and you often don't realize this until you have pain. Strengthening combined with nerve glides and stretches gives the nerve the ability to heal and improve.

The goal should be 15 min of total exercise once a day. The body releases chemicals when you exercise that reduce pain and improve how you feel.

BRIDGES



Lay on your back and have your knees spread apart. Make sure your head is supported and that you are comfortable. Then tighten your glutes and lift your hips as high as you can. Make sure to focus on the movement and move in a slower, controlled manner. It's normal to feel tension in your lower back.

TIP

If you start to cramp, that is normal. Just rest then continue once the cramp releases.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 12 repetitions



SINGLE LEG BRIDGE



The same position as the bridges but you keep one leg completely straight as you lift your hips. You will feel the leg that is down work really hard. Try to keep your hips from rocking as you lift.

TIP

Try to squeeze your glutes and focus on feeling your glute work as you lift.

DOSAGE

Dosage 2 sets of 10 on each side



CLAM SHELLS



Lay on your side and make sure your head is supported. When on your side, bend your knees and try to make them in line with your shoulders. Then stack your feet and spread your knees while your feet are touching. You will feel this in your hips.

TIP

You can lift as high as you would like without letting your hips open up. Try to keep your hips stacked.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 20 on each side



PLANK



Start lying down on your belly. Then, place your elbows under your shoulders and curl your toes underneath you. Then, lift your body as you tighten your core. You may only be able to hold for a few seconds to start, and that is okay.

TIP

Doing this on the floor or yoga mat is best. You can start by doing this on your knees and if you prefer your arms to be straight vs. on your elbows that is fine as well.

DOSAGE

2-3 sets of 30 second holds

GLUTE STRETCH

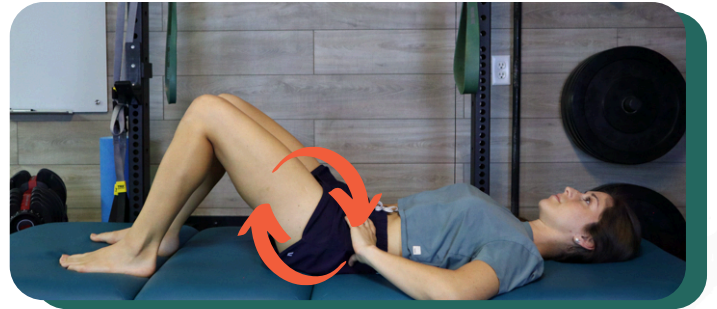


Lay on your back and bend the leg you want to stretch. Grab the outer knee and pull towards your other shoulder. You should feel a stretch in your buttocks. Make sure the other leg is straight.

TIP

Your sciatic nerve goes through your glutes, so you can try different angles of pull to feel the stretch differently. It's okay to pull so you feel a good stretch. You should not have any groin or shoulder pain with this.

PELVIC TILTS WITHOUT LEG OR NERVE PAIN



Flexion of the lower back, such as bending over and sitting, can be difficult with sciatica. Pelvic tilts allow us to regain some of that range of motion and tolerance. Start by laying on your back and having both knees bent and feet flat. Then, you will try to flatten your lower back to the ground by rocking your pelvis backward. You can gently contract your abs and glutes to assist in this movement. If you feel a zinger or nerve pain, then stop just short of causing that discomfort.

TIP

Make sure you breath and focus on the movement of your pelvis. It's normal to feel things moving and shifting.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 20 repetitions

DOWNWARD DOG



Start on your hands and knees. From that position get up on your hands and feet. Sit your hips back and up into the air. Once up then you will straighten one leg and drive that heel towards the ground. You want to act as if you are pedaling your feet and driving one heel into the ground at a time. You will feel a big stretch in the leg you are straightening.

TIP

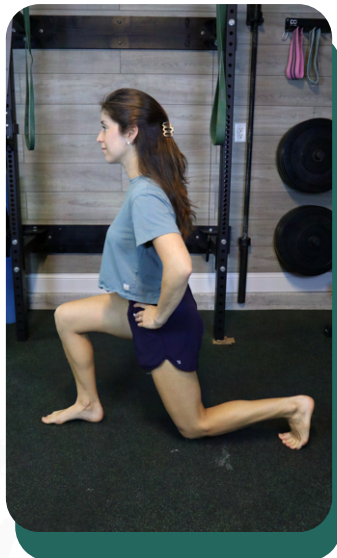
You can rest at any time. The higher your hips, the bigger the nerve stretch. It's also okay if you attempt to straighten both legs. It's just a bigger stretch.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 10 repetitions on each foot

Standing

LUNGE



My favorite standing exercise! It works for many muscle groups, and it begins to introduce higher-level strengthening. You will stand next to the counter or something sturdy. While holding on, take a large step forward and focus on staying tall with your body while bending both knees slightly. It's not about the depth of the lunge but rather the length. You should feel this in your legs.

TIP

You don't have to try to keep your heels on the ground.

DOSAGE

2 sets of 10 on each side

LET'S CONNECT



BLOG

Thank you for reading our Sciatica Pain Relief guide! We hope it has supported your recovery. For personalized advice, consult a movement professional for a thorough evaluation.



YOUTUBE

This guide is a starting point, but hands-on guidance can make all the difference. Stay proactive in your healing journey, and remember, progress takes time.

Check out our blog and YouTube channel for more resources—subscribe for the latest updates!

RESOURCES



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR STRETCHING YOUR LOWER BACK

In this guide you will learn 27 stretches that can be done anywhere to improve your back stiffness and mobility.



PRACTICAL AND EASY WAYS TO BUILD CORE STRENGTH

In this guide, you will learn 24 total exercises with dosage and tips from a Doctor of Physical Therapy that can help you today!



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