

Sciatica: Signs & Relief Sheet

The 4 signs it is a pinched nerve, the 3 red flags, and the relief routine.

✓ **Verified against published guidance** from Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic & Harvard Health · sources below

Red flags first: sudden leg numbness or weakness, pain after an injury, or trouble controlling bowels or bladder means get medical care now.

✓ Do This

Run the 4-Sign Check

- Pain travels back to leg
- One side, pins and needles
- Electric or burning quality

COACH'S TIP Worse with cough, sneeze or long sitting.

Ice First, 15 to 20 Minutes

- First few days
- Calms pain and swelling
- Equal break between sessions

COACH'S TIP Ice is the first-week tool.

Switch to Heat After a Few Days

- Loosens tight muscles
- Preps you for stretching
- About 20 minutes at a time

COACH'S TIP Heat speeds blood flow to the area.

Keep Gently Moving

- Short walks count
- Movement helps the nerve heal
- Light stretching helps

COACH'S TIP A day or two of rest, then move.

Try the Gentle Stretch Menu

- Knee-to-chest
- Gentle lying back extension
- Bridging and cat-cow

COACH'S TIP Slow, breathing, never into sharp pain.

Use OTC Anti-Inflammatories

- Ibuprofen or naproxen can help
- Ask the pharmacist about fit
- Follow the label dose

COACH'S TIP Medicine supports movement, not replaces it.

✗ Do Not

Do Not Take to Your Bed

- Bed rest slows recovery
- Short rest only
- Pain often gets worse

COACH'S TIP The couch is not a treatment.

Do Not Ignore the 3 Red Flags

- Sudden numbness or weakness
- Bowel or bladder changes
- Injury before the pain

COACH'S TIP Any of these: medical care now.

Do Not Wait Past a Week

- No improvement: call
- First time over 55: office visit
- Severe or worsening: call sooner

COACH'S TIP A week of self-care is the limit.

Do Not Stretch Into Sharp Pain

- A mild pull is fine
- Tell your doctor what worsened
- Sharp leg pain is a stop sign

COACH'S TIP Shooting pain down the leg means stop.

Do Not Assume Surgery Is Coming

- Most recover without it
- Weeks, not forever
- Reserved for severe cases

COACH'S TIP 4 to 6 weeks is the usual arc.

Do Not Confuse Hip and Nerve

- Hip pain sits in the groin
- Tingling points to nerve
- Sciatica radiates from the back

COACH'S TIP Where it starts tells the story.

THE NUMBERS BEHIND THIS SHEET

Three figures worth knowing

4 to 6 weeks

Typical improvement window for most sciatica, often without medical treatment

3

Red flags that mean get medical care now, not next week

20 min

Maximum length for an ice or heat session, with an equal break between