

Sciatica

Information for Patients



This leaflet has been written to give you the right information about sciatica and what you can do to help with your recovery.

What is sciatica?

The term sciatica generally relates to an irritation of the sciatic nerve.

Your sciatic nerve comes from the lower levels of your back, passes through your buttock, and down the back of your leg on its way to the foot. It is most often characterised by leg pain, but some people may also experience tingling or numbness. Back pain can also sometimes be associated with sciatica.

What are the common symptoms?

Pain: One of the main symptoms associated with sciatic nerve irritation is pain. In most cases, the discomfort will be felt on the back or outer edge of the thigh and/or calf and possibly into the foot. Back pain can be a feature of sciatica but not for everyone.

Pins & needles/numbness: Pins and needles, numbness (reduced or altered feeling), a feeling of heaviness in the leg or simply a 'weird' feeling that is hard to describe can be a sign of an upset nerve.

Worry: Pain can often make you feel vulnerable and can be concerning, especially if it is new and/or is affecting your normal everyday life. Reassuringly, these feelings are normal and it is worth reminding yourself that your back/leg is strong, robust and very resilient. It can be sore and nerves can get irritated but they remain strong and can improve.

What can I do to help myself?

Calm it down: Often the best place to start with any painful complaint is to try and calm it down. In a lot of cases there will be things your leg likes to do and some that it is less happy to do since your symptoms started. Calming it down simply means looking at the things it doesn't like and trying to make some adjustments or changes to make it easier for yourself. For example, sitting with your feet up on the coffee table or sitting on a firm chair might make your leg more uncomfortable. It might be that sitting with a bent knee (rather than straight) or on a softer chair with more cushioning makes life a little easier whilst your leg is unhappy. You may find resting your leg in a cross-legged position may help.

Get your back and leg moving: Movement is medicine for your body. Any movement is good movement, even if it is sore, however, if something is really painful then working around that movement is sensible.

Your back and leg are strong and that won't have changed since your symptoms began. Although it is sore, they remain robust and moving your back/leg as early as you can, can help improve your chances of a better overall outcome.

Will it get better?

For most people, sciatica will not be a pleasant experience but reassuringly, it does have the potential to get better. By understanding the issue as best you can and by adjusting what is sore to then allow you to explore some exercise/s, is often the best formula for success.

If you would like to know more about sciatica or find a greater choice of exercises, you can explore our dedicated webpage.

Search online: [Norfolk and Waveney MSK services](#) 'sciatica'

Exercises



On the bed. With one or both legs, bring your knees to your chest and allow your back to round. Continue to breathe normally and allow your back to round.

Complete little and often throughout the day.



Sitting. Look up to the ceiling and at the same time straighten your knee then look down, and at the same time bend your knee.

Complete this slowly and rhythmically for 30 seconds little and often throughout the day.



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