



PREVENTION & REHABILITATION – SELF-MANAGEMENT: PATIENT SECTION

What can I do for sciatica?☆

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Sciatica is a very common disabling condition frequently caused by a bulging disc compressing a nerve at the base of the spine. Sciatica involves pain, numbness or tingling down the back of the thigh and leg. There may be some low back pain, but there is usually more leg than back discomfort. There can even be weakness in the leg. Unfortunately, it can persist for months at a time and while rest is often prescribed this may actually do more harm than good (Abenheim et al., 2000; Deyo et al., 1986; Malmivaara et al., 1995).

Sciatica is usually aggravated by sitting, driving, bending forward, or lifting (see Figs. 1 and 2). A step-ladder approach to treatment is the best advice. Always begin by seeing your physician to confirm the diagnosis. Remember to avoid what harms you! This usually means don't sit for longer than 20 min without getting up, and for most cases avoid bending forward, especially in the morning (Cholewicki and McGill, 1996; Snook et al., 1998; McGill and Brown, 1992). This will "spare the spine" and prevent further irritation to the nerve.

The second step is to gradually bring the spine back into alignment by arching it (see Fig. 3). The yoga sphinx posture is ideal and can be progressed to the cobra pose or press-up. These may be uncomfortable in your back, but should relieve any leg symptoms (Long et al., 2004; Albert and Manniche, 2012). If they increase your leg symptoms then you should avoid them.

The third pillar of self-care for sciatica is to try to mobilize the nerve by gliding or sliding it back and forth without stretching it at all. This is called a nerve mobilization or sciatic slider (Neer and Butler, 2006). It should **never be painful** and in fact should immediately make bending forward better tolerated.

The sciatic nerve slider

- Begin in a seated position
- There are two basic phases of the nerve mobilization

Phase 1 (see Fig. 4)

1. Lift your head up until you are extending your neck and looking up to the ceiling
2. Stick out your chest until you are arching your lower back
3. Raise the leg that is affected by sciatica until the knee is straight and your toes are pointing up towards your knee.



Figure 1 Prolonged sitting postures, especially while driving should be minimized.

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Figure 2 Bending forward posture to avoid.

4. Remember – none of these movements should increase the sciatic or back pain.

Phase 2 (see Fig. 5)

1. Drop your leg fully until it is dangling
2. Bend your neck forward until your chin is against your chest
3. Allow your lower back to round forward into a slightly slouched position

Repetitions

- Perform 12–20 slow repetitions

Sets

- Once



Figure 3 Sphinx posture.



Figure 4 Sciatic nerve slider – Phase 1.

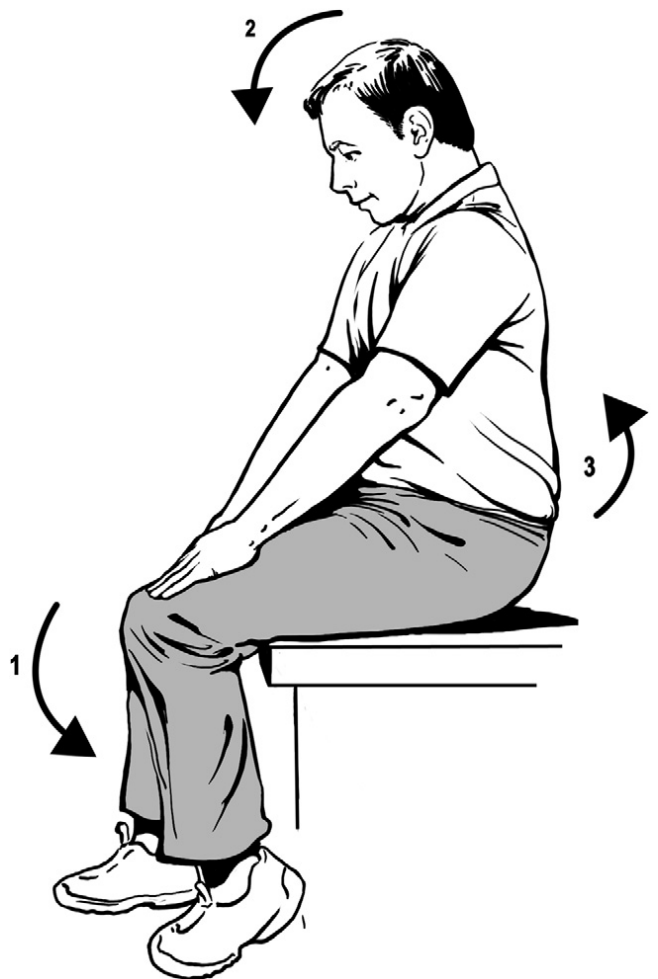


Figure 5 Sciatic nerve slider – Phase 2.

Frequency

- Perform 4–6 times/day

Duration

- 1–2 weeks

Symptoms should improve with the slider. If they don't be sure to consult an appropriately trained physician.

References

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