

Back & Leg Pain

Your GP or Physiotherapist may have diagnosed you with 'sciatica', having a 'prolapsed disc' or 'piriformis syndrome'. They all essentially mean you are experiencing back pain and also leg symptoms that may include pain, tingling or pins and needles.

Fortunately, it can be managed really effectively with advice and targeted exercises. Whilst following the advice and exercises below, try to listen to your body and adapt the activities that cause lasting pain. Back and leg pain is helped by keeping active and moving, going for regular walks and reducing prolonged sitting.

Things should start to ease gradually but it may take a few weeks before you notice any change. Nerve pains settle but they usually settle slowly and can take a number of months until they fully resolve. Let your Physiotherapist know if you are struggling, not seeing any improvement or experiencing constant symptoms or any weakness of the leg/foot/ankle. Also, seek advice early if you are experience leg symptoms into both legs at the same time.

Please also see the [Cauda Equina](#) checklist on our website (found on the 'Back pain Self-help page') and act accordingly as described if you experience any of these symptoms.

If you have been diagnosed as having and 'Back pain with Stenosis' (normal for the older population) then please refer to '[Back Pain and Stenosis ACE handout](#)' instead.

Exercises

Perform these regular if possible, ideally 2-3 times a day. Don't force any movements, particularly if they cause lasting pain. If any movements are troublesome, start gently and you will usually find you become more accustomed to the movements with little and regular practice.

Exercise 1 – Lying Knee Rolling

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet resting on your bed

Let your knees roll together from side to side to feel a stretch in your back. You may find one direction to more comfortable. Just avoid any sharp/pinching pain

Repeat 5-10 times each direction



Exercise 2 – Lying Knee Hugs

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet resting on your bed

Hug one/both knee to your chest to feel a stretch in your lower back

Repeat 5-10 times



Exercise 3 - Piriformis Stretch

Lie down on your back. Place your affected leg's ankle on the opposite knee

Reach forwards and pull the good leg towards you until you feel a tolerable stretch in the affected side's buttock. If it is a struggle to reach then you could use a towel around the shin to pull instead.

Can also perform in sitting as shown. Place the affected leg's ankle on the opposite knee then lean forwards to achieve the stretch.

Hold 30 seconds



Exercises 4 – Self Soft Tissue Massage

You may find it helpful to massage any tender soft tissue areas of your buttock using a tennis ball against a wall. Find the most tender spots and keep the pressure on until the associated pain fades (can take between 10-90 seconds). Then move to another area and repeat if you find this therapeutic. Avoid pressing over the bony part of your lateral hip you will probably just find this irritable.

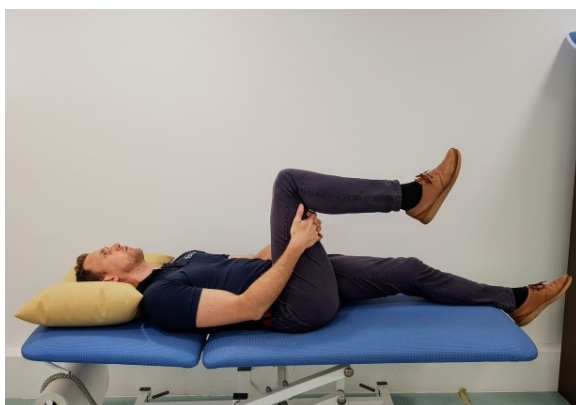
This will only give short lasting relief but can be used regularly to give you comfort whilst you progress with your hip strengthening programme. Stop simply if you find it aggravating.



Exercise 5 - Nerve Glides

Lie on your back. Hold the back of the knee and extend the knee until you feel a slight stretch down the back of the leg. Return to starting position.

Repeat 5-10 times. Perform smaller movements and gradually build up as able.



Exercise 6 – Standing Extensions

This exercise can be particularly helpful if you spend many hours sitting or driving. Expect mild discomfort but if this causes long-lasting pain then either go more gently or stop completely.

Stand with your hands in the small of your back

Gently lean back before returning to the start position

Repeat 5-10 times



Exercise 7- Strengthening

Lastly, strengthening exercises are really helpful. To get you started, try either/both:

i) repeated double leg bridges with lying

ii) repeated squats in standing

Perform until you achieve a short-lasting discomfort/fatigue feeling that lasts about 20-30 mins.

Increase the number of repetitions as a way of self-progressing as you improve and find these exercises easier to perform.

