PAIN & INJURY GUIDE

Sciatica: your 5-minute routine

Gentle back movements of the kind used alongside staying active when back pain comes with leg pain.

Scan for the full guide

How often: Once a day to start, building to two or three times a day if it feels good.

Total time: about 5 minutes. **You will need:** a firm, comfortable surface to lie on (a bed or mat).

Before you start

- This is general information based on NHS physiotherapy leaflets. It is not a personal treatment plan. If a doctor, physiotherapist or osteopath has given you different advice, follow that.
- Move slowly and smoothly. Mild discomfort or a stretching feeling is fine. Sharp pain is not.
- The pain should settle back to your usual level within an hour or two. If it is worse the next day, do fewer repeats or a smaller movement, or leave that exercise out for a few days.

Your routine

1 Pelvic tilt

about 1 min

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat.
Gently rock your pelvis so your lower back flattens, then let it arch slightly. Move slowly and only as far as is comfortable.

How much: 10 slow repeats (pause for up to 5 seconds at each end)

2 Knee rolls

about 1 min

Lie on your back with your knees bent and together.
Let both knees roll gently to one side, then to the other.

How much: 10 slow rolls

3 Knee to chest

about 1 min

Lie on your back with your knees bent.
Draw one knee towards your chest, with your hands behind the thigh. Lower it and swap legs.

How much: Hold 5 seconds, up to 10 times, swapping legs

4 Cat and camel

about 1 min

On hands and knees, hands under shoulders and knees under hips.
Slowly round your back up towards the ceiling, then let it sag gently down, keeping your neck long.

How much: 10 slow repeats

5 Glute bridge

about 1 min

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat.
Squeeze your buttocks and lift your hips until your body makes a straight line. Do not arch your back.
Lower slowly.

How much: Hold 5 seconds, 8 to 10 times

Good to know

- The NHS advises carrying on with normal activities as much as you can, starting gentle exercise early and not sitting or lying down for long periods.
- Moving may hurt, but this is not harmful and can help you recover more quickly.

Easier, or harder?

- Too sore? Do fewer repeats, make the movement smaller, or miss that exercise out for a few days.
- Feeling good? Only add a few repeats, or a second set, when the routine feels easy and comfortable. There is no rush.

Keep track

Tick a box each day you do your routine.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Get urgent help first, and do not exercise, if you have any of these

Call 999 or go to A&E straight away if you have back pain together with any of these. They can be signs of a rare but serious condition such as cauda equina syndrome. Do not drive yourself.

- Numbness or tingling around your genitals, buttocks or inner thighs (the saddle area)
- Difficulty passing urine, loss of bladder or bowel control, or being unable to feel when you are passing urine or stool
- Pain, tingling, weakness or numbness in both legs, or sciatica on both sides, or weakness in a leg that is getting worse
- New changes to sexual sensation or function alongside back or leg pain
- Chest pain, or back pain that started after a serious accident such as a car crash

See your GP promptly, or call NHS 111, if

- Feeling hot, cold, shivery or generally unwell, or severe pain that starts suddenly or quickly gets worse
- Unexplained weight loss, or a lump, swelling or change in the shape of your back
- Pain that is worse at night or does not ease with rest, or is worse when you cough, sneeze or open your bowels
- A history of cancer and new, persistent back pain

Stop these exercises if

- If the leg pain is getting stronger or spreading further down the leg as you do these, stop and speak to your GP or physiotherapist.
- If you are not improving after about 4 weeks, or things are getting worse sooner, get it checked. A GP, physiotherapist or osteopath can assess what is going on and adjust your exercises.

Want your problem assessed?

If you would like your symptoms assessed, you are welcome to book an appointment with Lance Peterson Osteopathy in Chichester: lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/book.html · 07899 358698. Osteopathic care is not right for everyone, and if something needs medical attention first, you will be told.

The full plain-English guide, with the common questions and sources, is at: lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/guide/sciatica.html

Based on

The exercises are described in my own words from these NHS and Chartered Society of Physiotherapy resources. Repeats and holds are kept to the gentle, beginner end of the ranges they give. Links were checked in October 2026.

- University Hospitals Sussex NHS Trust: Low back pain (2025)
  https://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/864.2-Low-back-pain-2025.pdf
- NHS Lothian Physiotherapy: Back pain with leg pain pack and back exercises
  https://services.nhslothian.scot/wp-content/uploads/sites/63/2022/09/NHS-Lothian-Back-Pain-with-Leg-Pain-Pack.pdf
- NHS: Sciatica
  https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sciatica/
- NHS: Back pain
  https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/