

Where can I get more information?

NHS Choices advice about sciatica:
www.nhs.uk/conditions/sciatica

British Association of Spine Surgeons
www.spinesurgeons.ac.uk

British Pain Society
www.britishpainsociety.org

Healthy activities in your area:

Lambeth: www.lambeth.gov.uk

Southwark: www.southwark.gov.uk

Bromley: www.bromleyhealthcare.org.uk



Useful contacts

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS.

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas'

t: 020 7188 8803 at Guy's

e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language support services

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

Coping with sciatica

Information for patients



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What is sciatica?

It is a name often used to describe pain felt in the back, leg and foot. The pain can vary from mild to severe and may on occasions be accompanied by pins and needles and numbness.

What causes sciatica?

Sciatica can have a number of causes, though it is rarely due to serious disease. One cause – irritation of one or more of the nerves leaving the spine – can be the result of a strain of the back muscles, ligaments and joints of the spine. Less frequently, it is the result of a disc bulge or narrowing of one of the bony tunnels that the nerves pass through as they leave the spine.

When will it get better?

The good news is that for most people, an episode of sciatica will start to settle within four to six weeks. You will not do any harm by keeping mobile and staying at work, although you may need to adapt some of your activities in the short term.

Most episodes of sciatica will not require any further investigation, but you must contact your doctor or health professional urgently if you experience a new onset of any of the following symptoms:

- An inability to pass urine when you feel that you need to go.

- Loss of control of your bowels.
- Numbness around your genital area.
- Inability to get an erection.
- Worsening weakness in both legs.

How can I help myself?

Take your pain medication: it is important to take your pain medication regularly as this will help enable you to stay active.

Be patient: As best you can, be patient with your mind and body. The long-term outlook is good.

Exercise: Gentle exercise will prevent your muscles from becoming weaker and your body becoming less flexible. You may need to shorten the distance that you would normally walk, cycle or swim at first, but these activities can be built up gradually over time without doing yourself harm.



What should I do if my symptoms are not easing?

If your symptoms are not settling at six weeks, you should discuss things with your doctor or healthcare professional, who will arrange for further assessment of your sciatica.

