

# Top 10 Most Burning Questions and Answers for Sciatica

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## The Sciatica Specialists

### 1. Q: How long is this going to take to go away?

A: It depends...it depends on YOU.

In general, it takes to 4 to 8 weeks to go through the first 2 phases of healing (no pain, all movement back to normal).

It may take another 1 to 4 months to get back to all your strength back, and another period of time to return to high level activities...depending on how active you are. These are the third and fourth phase of healing.

Here are 10 variables that determine how fast someone can heal:

- ✓ Overall health. Healthy fit people heal faster. Younger people heal faster.
- ✓ Other health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, tobacco use, alcohol abuse and body weight all influence healing rates...and make the time to heal longer.
- ✓ Diet. People who consume more nutrients in their calories (Dr. Joel Fuhrman calls this "Nutrarian") heal faster than those who primarily eat processed foods.
- ✓ Rest levels. Our bodies need sleep and rest to rebuild. A lack of sleep slows healing time.
- ✓ Stress levels. People who have high levels of stress heal more slowly.
- ✓ Sedentary lifestyle. People who sit all day for work or to watch TV heal more slowly.
- ✓ People who follow advice and instruction from top level healthcare professionals heal more quickly than those who do not follow-through with care.
- ✓ People who are highly aware of their daily postures and habits heal more quickly...because they can adjust habits such as sleep or sitting positions more quickly.
- ✓ Readers heal more quickly. People with higher attention spans are more likely to be self-educated on a topic and more likely to follow-through with successful treatment.

- ✓ People who think there's hope tend to be more persistent and won't let anything stop them. (Recently we had a man with sciatica fly from Hawaii to California to be successfully treated for sciatica).

**2. Q: How long before I see improvements?**

A: Most people we see in the clinic feel better in 1 to 3 visits...or within 1 to 2 weeks. If you go longer than 2 weeks without feeling better or moving better...you may be wrong about the cause of your sciatica regardless of what your X-ray or MRI shows.

**3. Q: Can I be completely healed or will this come back again?**

A: Most people we see who complete the 4 Phases of Healing (meaning they no longer have pain, they have full mobility and strength, and they're back to doing all the activities they want to do without pain)...they have a minimal chance the pain will return.

The stronger the person is...the less likely the sciatica symptoms will come back.

Your body is a bit like a car. If you take care of it, regularly change the oil and keep it running and fine tuned... little chance of break down.

If you ignore it...very likely to break down and be in need of repair.

**4. Q: Do I need any special equipment?**

A: At Excel PT, we use a minimalist approach...We don't use big, fancy, expensive equipment...

There are some exceptions, including traction and laser. There is a machine (Saunders Lumbar Home Traction unit) which we find very effective for home use...for people who show signs their sciatica may be relieved with traction.

Otherwise, most exercises can be done with a simple ball, exercise bands and a safe place to exercise.

Our model focuses on world-class hands-on Physical Therapist, a table and some basic exercise equipment you can do at home or on the road if traveling.

This works best for most people.

**5. Q: Should I use heat or ice on my leg?**

A: The cause of most sciatica (pain, numbness or tingling in the leg) is in the lower back. Ice or heat on the leg will not change that.

Consider that sciatica is “inflammation” on the nerve. Sometimes heat can increase that inflammation.

So if you’re inflamed...do you want to put heat on it and make it more inflamed?

Or ice to calm the inflammation down.

We have seen some people use ice on the lower back to calm down the inflammation temporarily.

**6. Q: Which exercises should I do?**

A: The best exercises for you depend on what the cause of your sciatica is.

We will cover the 3 most common causes...

Herniated discs

Stenosis, arthritis

Pelvic or SI joint problem

Each has a series of gradually more advanced exercises.

So the key to picking the right exercise is to find the cause of your sciatica.

**7. Q: How often should I do the exercises? And do I need to do them forever?**

A: Most people we work with in the clinic for sciatica do the exercises at least once per day...every day.

Some will do them up to 3 times per day.

Doing the same exact exercises for years without changing could be a mistake.

In general, to get stronger, your exercise should progress and get more difficult as your strength improves.

WE ARE ALL AGING...SO IF WE ARE NOT GETTING STRONGER...WE ARE GETTING WEAKER!

With training your body adapts and gets stronger.

Keeping that in mind, there are 2 rules to training:

1. Everything works.
2. Nothing works forever.

This means that any exercise (although difficult) MAY make you stronger.

But once your body is no longer challenged, it's time to move on to something different or more challenging.

One of the best things you should incorporate into your program during Phases of Healing for your Sciatica is a consistent walking program.

People who walk every day have less risk of reinjuring their back and sciatica.

8. Q: What do I need to do for complete care? Am I going to relapse?

A: The best thing to do for sciatica, if you are worried about it coming back again in the future, is to complete all 4 phases of healing.

**Phase One** is where you focus on getting rid of the pain, numbness and tingling.

**Phase Two** is where you focus on getting normal movement back.

**Phase Three** is where you focus on getting full strength.

**Phase Three** is where you go back to previous activities you want to do.

Just because the pain is gone, that doesn't mean that you are fully healed.

In our clinic, when we see a person who had sciatica...and they are now pain free and have full motion and on their way to attaining full strength, we ask:

“What activities have you avoided in the past month that you want to get back to doing?”

Some will say walking, or golfing or gardening...something along those lines.

And we'll tell that person to take the next month or two and start to incorporate everything you want to do that you could not do before. Most times we guide them as to which activities they should incorporate first. When they have fully attained their previous strength, they should have all previous activities incorporated into their routine.

They keep doing their exercises at home to get stronger and stronger.

Most come back for a recheck appointment in 2 months and have no trouble at all. At that time we can help them progress their exercises to a more challenging program if they need it.

Some do have a relapse.

We then take a look at the activity and at the program and help them get on the right track.

As mentioned before, people who are stronger recover more quickly...People who make good choices in their activities heal more quickly.

So it's usually only one or two visits before that person is on the right track again.

## **9. Q: How do I know the cause of my pain?**

A: There are 3 common causes of pain...and here are some general guidelines for each.

People with sciatica from a herniated disc usually have pain bending forward, especially bending with a twist, or with coughing or sneezing.

The sciatica pain they experience is usually sharp, it starts in the low back and runs specifically down the back of the leg...possibly into the foot.

Herniated disc sufferers are usually 35 years of age or younger.

People suffering from sciatica because of stenosis or arthritis usually answer yes to these 3 questions:

- ✓ 50 Years of age or older?
- ✓ Pain with standing or walking?
- ✓ Relief with sitting?

People suffering with sciatica from SI Joint or Pelvic problems usually have pain with sitting for long periods, moving from sit to stand, rolling over in bed, or sometimes walking. But the pain they have with walking is not relieved completely with sitting, because sitting is also a provocative activity.

The sciatica they experience is usually on the outside of the thigh, lateral hip or groin, into the testicles in men.

Symptoms may include heaviness of one leg, or feeling twisted.

#### **10. Q: Which position should I sleep in?**

A: On your back is best. In order to successfully sleep on your back you need the proper firmness of the bed, and proper pillow support. You can train yourself to sleep on your back.

Next would be on your side, however those with shoulder or hip problems may not be able to sleep on their side.

Last would be on your stomach. There are numerous reasons why this is dangerous.

Regardless, an important key is to keep your spine in "neutral". This means that it is not twisted to the right or left...but keeps the natural curve it normally has.

Pillows of folded towels can be placed under your knees, under your side, or under your feet to help you sleep in the least painful position for you.