Which Sciatica Pattern Fits You Best?

A 60-second guide to where it hurts, what brings it on and what may help.

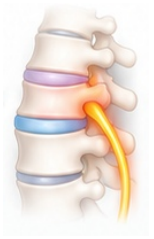
Start with the warning signs

Pain that feels like sciatica can have several causes. Match your symptoms to the closest pattern below, then take this guide to your doctor or physical therapist.

Go to the ER today if you have

- Numbness in your groin, inner thighs or buttocks (the “saddle” area)
- New trouble controlling your bladder or bowels
- Weakness in both legs, or rapidly worsening leg weakness
- Back pain with fever, a history of cancer or unexplained weight loss

Where do you feel it most?



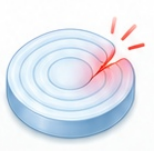
1 DISC / NERVE ROOT (E.G. L4–L5, L5–S1)

Pain shoots below the knee, often into the foot

Burning, electric pain, numbness or tingling in a strip of the leg. Sitting, coughing, sneezing or bending forward may make it worse.

Often helps · Short, frequent walks. Change position every 20–30 min. Gentle back-bending or sideways movement helps some people.

Often worse · Long, slouched sitting, bending while twisting, or hamstring stretching.



2 DISC PAIN WITHOUT NERVE PRESSURE (E.G. ANNULAR TEAR)

Deep ache across the low back

A band-like or midline ache that stays above the knee. Sitting, leaning forward, rising from a chair or sneezing may aggravate it.

Often helps · Change position often. Try lumbar support, walking and a gradual return to activity.

Often worse · Prolonged sitting or repeated forward bending.



3 PIRIFORMIS / DEEP GLUTEAL PAIN

Pain deep in one buttock

A tender spot you can press. Pain may travel down the back of the thigh. Sitting on that side often aggravates it. Massage may ease it.

Often helps · Gentle glute release, side-lying leg lifts or gentle hip mobility work.

Often worse · Aggressive deep massage or sitting on hard surfaces.



4 SACROILIAC (SI) JOINT

Pain at the “dimple” above one buttock

You can point to the spot with one finger. Rolling over in bed, climbing stairs or standing on one leg can bring it on.

Often helps · Core and glute stability work, with weight balanced evenly.

Often worse · Standing on one leg, long strides or twisting.



5 SPINAL STENOSIS

Both legs feel heavy or achy when you walk or stand

More common after 50. Symptoms ease when you sit or lean forward, for example on a shopping cart. Discuss this pattern with your doctor.

Watch where the pain moves

Pain retreating toward your back can be a good sign. If it spreads farther down your leg or new numbness appears, ease off. **New weakness? See a doctor the same day.**

Want a plan for your back?
Track your triggers and decode your MRI in the 30-day workbook.
decoder.glpcourse.link

Patterns overlap. This educational guide does not replace a clinical examination. If you are struggling emotionally, call or text 988 (US), call 116 123 (UK), or visit findahelpline.com.