

## Sciatica and Sciatic Nerve Entrapment (Piriformis Syndrome)

**Nerve entrapment** of the sciatic nerve in the pelvis near the piriformis muscle is **more common than Sciatica**. Commonly called **piriformis syndrome** a tight piriformis muscle can entrap the nerve. Pain may be localized deep in the butt cheek or run down the leg!

**Sciatica** is pain that travels along the path of the sciatic nerve. The sciatic nerve travels from the lower back through the hips and buttocks and down each leg. Sciatica originates in the **lower back** most often when a herniated disk or an overgrowth of bone puts pressure on part of the nerve.



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### Practice

1. **Begin standing against a wall with the feet parallel hip width apart** and notice the level of the hips relative to each other – is one touching the wall more? Is one higher? Does it feel like one leg is longer than the other? Awareness of our tendencies and stabilizing and keeping the pelvis level is key to supporting the hips and pelvis in all poses & whenever we are standing.



2. Slowly **fold** forward and notice the alignment of the hips on the wall as you fold. Keep them level as you fold halfway and return to standing. Notice if you tend to elevate or drop one hip.



3. **Tabletop:** with knees hip width apart. Focus your awareness on the shape and any sensations in all poses. Note here the **stability of the pelvis**, note the **hip alignment** – notice any adjustments you make to keep your hips level if they are not.



4. **Cat and cow** (with wide knees) – these are poses to mobilize the spine, and to connect movement and breath – inhale and drop the belly towards the mat and lift the chin; then exhale arching the back into cat, tucking the chin to the chest, and shifting the weight slightly back towards the heels. Shift weight forward repeating cow 3-5 times.



5. **End the last round in child's pose** and observe the hip alignment again.



6. Explore the feeling in the glutes and the pelvis **holding in lateral sunbird**. From table, extend one leg and keep hips level. Slowly move the foot across the midline of body.



Can you keep the hips level with each other as the extended leg crosses the center line?

Return to tabletop and notice if the two side feel different after the stretch. Do the other side. Avoid crossing the midline if it causes pain.

### Supine (on the back):

Overall: Take a rest/pause between each pose. Focus on axial extension (lengthening of the spine) even when on your back and on identifying all sensation 'feelings' after dynamic and static poses. On your back observe if the back of the hips resting against the mat are level. Make any adjustments needed.

7. **Wind relieving pose:** on each side, hug in one knee, alternate leg can be bent, or the leg can be extended. Observe if lifting the one leg levels the hips.



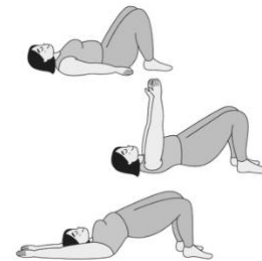
Inhale and pull the knee closer to the chest, exhale and let it relax. 3-5 times each side, resting between.

### 8. Rolling bridge

Roll up and then down 5 or more times with the breath (inhale up exhale down) **then hold at ¾ height** for 5 breaths. (*Holding the bridge all the way at the top engages the glutes more than you may want to if you have nerve issues*).

Visualize axial/spinal lengthening from the crown of the head to the tailbone.

Arms overhead is an option only.



9. **Reclined pigeon**, a static hip opener, stretches the piriformis.

Hold on each side for up to a minute.

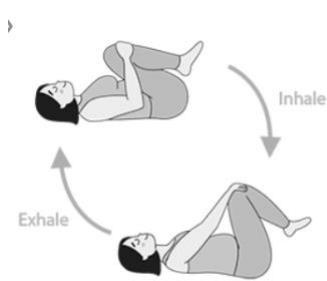


10. **Reclined bound angle** (hold static)

Or for a piriformis stretch as an option on the in-breath bring the knees in, exhale and relax the knees. Repeat.



### 11. Apanasana



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Releases the lower back – when back is fully supported. Inhale and pull the knees in, exhale and relax the knees and lower core. 5x.

Fingertips point towards the toes.

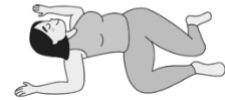
### 12. Supine twist. Strap optional.



### 13. Windshield wiper the knees, inhale to center exhale to one side. Repeat 5 – 10 times.

### Prone:

### 14. Rest in a gentle back bend in **crocodile** to finish.



## SCIATICA: YOGA DO'S and don'ts

1. **ALWAYS align and lengthen spine first before any pose** to decrease compression.

**A compressed or rounded lower back** may contribute to pressure on the sciatic nerve.

Practice creating a **neutral spine** while lying on your back or standing with your back against a wall. Allow the lower back to curve in gently, while elongating from the tip of your tailbone to the crown of your head, **inviting space** between the lumbar vertebrae with every deep breath.

2. **Reset the sacrum with wind relieving pose – one side at a time.**

**LOOK for pelvis imbalance in any of your poses for SACRUM issue clues – such as in tabletop or standing against a wall.**



If you have sciatica, and the two sides of your pelvis don't feel level—or if you've been told that one of your legs is shorter than the other—try sacral resets. Because sciatica and other back pain can have their roots at the sacroiliac joint, certain “sacral resets” like wind relieving pose (i.e., low-risk movements borrowed from physical therapy that are designed to correct the pain-causing **asymmetry** and restore optimal alignment between the sacrum and ilia) may help to move the sacrum into a position that causes less pressure on the sciatic nerve.

### **3. Mobilize and extend the lower back.**

Use gentle poses that gradually improve the mobility of the lower back, the location of much sciatic nerve compression. Practicing pelvic tilts while lying on your back can increase the flexibility of the lower back such as at the start of a bridge to warm you up for some gentle backbends like crocodile, baby cobra and sphinx.

### **4. Stretch the glutes and hamstrings.**

It is all connected. Tightness in the glutes and hamstrings may restrict the sciatic nerve and this tightness also may result from and contribute to poor posture.

Try supine twist poses.

## **YOGA DON'TS**

- 1. Don't go so far into any pose that you feel an increase in symptoms in pain, tingling or numbness.** Only take any pose to a degree to which your body is ready.
- 2. Avoid slouching.**

**Rounding the lower back too much can lead to or exacerbate disc and nerve problems. In all neutral spine poses like mountain, staff (seated with legs forward), and warrior poses, always stay aware of axial extension - aligning and lengthening of your spine.** This includes lining up your ears, shoulders, and hips; curving your lower back in gently/naturally; and lengthening the crown of your head and the tip of your tailbone away from each other.

- 3. Don't practice poses that require a strong contraction of the glutes if it causes pain such as sunbird.**
- 4. Don't forward-fold past your limit. OR fold only halfway OR try it with bent knees or stick with supine wind relieving pose.**
- 5. Always avoid twisting while folding if it causes discomfort (because the spine is usually not lengthened in a twist) or twisting altogether if sciatica is flaring up.**

### ***Adapted from:***

Brian Dorfman Holistic anatomy and physiology for yoga HAPY accessed Dec 2021.

Photos credit: Tumee.com