

# The 9 Most Dangerous Things You Can Do If You Have Sciatica

Not necessarily in order of importance

## 1. Repeating the movement that originally caused the sciatica

Repeating the movement that originally caused the sciatica may aggravate the nerve compression and/or re-strain or sprain the muscles, and/or the ligaments, and/or the tendons involved. This may seem obvious but it is not uncommon for practitioners to see a patient repeat the actions that originally caused an injury before it has completely healed and as a result aggravating the nerve compression and/or re-straining or spraining the muscles, and/or the ligaments, and/or the tendons involved and extending the time it will take to heal that injury. As this can be very frustrating for all involved it is important to keep in mind when you have a case of sciatica or have recently had a case of sciatica.

So if you currently have sciatica or have recently (within the last 3 months or less) had a bout of sciatica and know what movement caused it, do your best to avoid that movement, especially within the first 12 weeks following the original injury occurring. If you do aggravate a current or recent bout of sciatica in this way, it may and often does result in a worsening of that case of sciatica. And can and often does also result in the case requiring a longer healing time which can often be as much a double or more of what the healing time could of been.

If you currently have a case of sciatica but are not sure how it occurred then I would recommend that you avoid any actions that you think may have caused the injury and all the other actions in this list below, to give yourself the best possible chance of a quick and lasting recovery.

## 2. Lifting Weight of any kind or anything that causes weight to pass through your body

Weight lifting of any kind could cause more compression on the nerve root and/or re-strain or sprain the muscles, and/or ligaments, and/or tendons involved.

Especially lifting weight in front of your body could cause more compression on the nerve root or re-strain or sprain the muscles, and/or ligaments, and/or tendons involved.

Lifting weight of any kind puts internal pressure not only on the muscles ligaments and tendons of the spine but also on the intervertebral disc's. This pressure can be enough to cause more compression on the nerve root or re-strain or sprain the muscles, and/or ligaments, and/or tendons involved in sciatica. And especially lifting weight held in front of your body has the potential to cause more compression on the nerve root and re-strain or sprain the muscles, and/or ligaments, and/or tendons involved in sciatica. Holding weight in front of you has more potential for damage here because this movement transfers even more pressure into the intervertebral disc's, muscle tendons and ligaments of the lower back.

So if you currently have sciatica or have recently (within the last 3 months or less) had a bout of sciatica, do your best to avoid lifting, especially weight in front of you and especially within the first 12 weeks following the original injury occurring. If you do aggravate a current or recent bout of sciatica in this way, it may and often does result in a worsening of that case of sciatica. And can and often does also result in the case requiring a longer healing time which can often be as much a double or more of what the healing time could of been.

### 3. Long periods of sitting

A long or even short period of sitting often puts extra internal pressure on the nerve root which can increase the pain of sciatica especially in the more severe cases. This extra internal pressure can be caused by any form of sitting whether in a comfortable or uncomfortable chair and whether you are working or not working. And often driving puts extra internal pressure on the nerve root aggravating the pain of sciatica as well.

Obviously this is not good news as sitting is usually associated with rest and relaxation, but it is often best to avoid sitting especially in the more severe cases of sciatica.

For most people with sciatica the best resting position is lying on your back with your knees straight and feet close together as this position not only does not involve any weight transfer through the spine but also reduces pressure in and around the intervertebral disc's.

### 4. Twisting movement

Twisting movements of any kind puts internal pressure not only on the muscles ligaments and tendons of the spine but also on the intervertebral disc's. This pressure can be enough to cause more compression on the nerve root or re-strain or sprain the muscles, and/or ligaments, and/or tendons involved in sciatica.

So if you currently have sciatica or have recently (within the last 3 months or less) had a bout of sciatica do your best to avoid twisting movements of any kind, especially within the first 12 weeks following the original injury occurring. If you do aggravate a current or recent bout of sciatica in this way, it may and often does result in a worsening of that case of sciatica. And can and often does also result in the case requiring a longer healing time which can often be as much a double or more of what the healing time could of been.

## 5. Jarring actions

Jarring actions of any kind could cause more compression on the nerve root and/or re-strain or sprain the muscles, and/or ligaments, and/or tendons involved in sciatica.

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So if you currently have sciatica or have recently (within the last 3 months or less) had a bout of sciatica do your best to avoid jarring actions, within the first 12 weeks following the original injury occurring. If you do aggravate a current or recent bout of sciatica in this way, it may and often does result in a worsening of that case of sciatica. And can and often does also result in the case requiring a longer healing time which can often be as much a double or more of what the healing time could of been.

## 6. Allowing yourself to get cold.

Allowing yourself to get cold can often aggravate this condition or can even be the original cause of it. Even a slight chill anywhere on your body can aggravate sciatica. But allowing your whole body to get cold is highly likely to increase the pain and restriction of movement that comes with sciatica.

According to Chinese Medicine the Kidneys are responsible for the functioning of the lower back and knees, and the climatic influence that relates to the kidneys is the cold. So the lower back is more prone to attacks of the cold than any other climatic influence, and the cold can often have a direct effect on the kidneys and on the lower back and on sciatica. Furthermore if the patient already has weak kidneys, according to Chinese Medicine that patient will be prone to problems with the lower back including but not limited to sciatica. And it is very common for modern men especially, but also women, to have weak kidneys according to Chinese Medicine, for a number of reasons. These reasons include, excessive

sexual activity, especially excessive ejaculation for men and especially as they get over 30 years of age and well beyond, prescription and recreational drugs, and overwork. All of these things can drain and weaken the Kidney energy according to Chinese Medicine, making that person more prone to problems relating to the Kidneys, including lower back pain and sciatica.

So if you have sciatica it is important to be aware if you are getting cold and to dress to keep warm. And to be especially careful not to become chilled when you sleep. As the bodies defenses against attacks from climatic influences are weaker when you are sleeping.

## 7. Extreme sports

Any extreme sport has the potential to aggravate this condition through jarring and/or twisting and/or weight passing through the injury site. Sports in this list would include but not be limited to; surfing, snowboarding, kite boarding, windsurfing, motocross, sky diving, quad biking, base jumping, bungee jumping, hang gliding, skiing, ski jumping, indoor climbing, adventure racing, aggressive inline skating, BMX, mountain biking, sand boarding, skate boarding, speed biking, water skiing, barefoot water skiing, free diving, diving, wakeboarding, white water kayaking, white water rafting and martial arts . And although not listed as extreme sports rugby, soccer, racket sports and trampoline have the potential to do further damage here also.

For instance in the case of medium to big wave surfing if the wave lip hits your upper body it could transfer weight internally and put internal pressure onto the compressed nerve root and/or re-strain or sprain any already strained and/or sprained muscles, and/or tendons and/or ligaments.

So the rule here is to avoid all these sports if you have a current or have had a recent bout of sciatica and to continue to avoid these sports for a least 3 months after all the symptoms have gone to be sure to avoid putting internal pressure onto the compressed nerve root and or re-straining or spraining any already strained and/or sprained muscles, and/or tendons and/or ligaments and/or intervertebral disc's.

## 8. Lovemaking or Sex and Period problems

While lovemaking is usually good for your overall health and wellbeing, for men, excessive ejaculation can aggravate sciatica or even be the original cause of sciatica. As according to Chinese Medicine the male body puts a large amount of its energy into producing sperm which can produce a new life, excessive ejaculation depletes kidney energy and the kidney's have a major influence over the lower back. In all but the most severe cases of sciatica mild lovemaking without ejaculation should be ok.

How much is excessive ejaculation? This will vary from individual to individual but for any male with sciatica I advise to try to avoid ejaculation more than once a week, and the more you make love gently without ejaculation or re-injury to the back the stronger your back and general health will become. A great book for teaching males how to make love without ejaculation is; "The Multi-Orgasmic Man" Authored by Mantak Chai and Douglas Abrams Arava ISBN number 0-06-251336-2.

For men and women, overly vigorous lovemaking also can result in pressure on the nerve root and/or re-strain and/or sprain the muscles and/or tendons and/or ligaments.

For women mild lovemaking itself is not a problem but excessive menstruation or excessive childbearing can have the same effects on Kidney energy as mentioned above that excessive ejaculation has in a male. So if you are a woman with on-going sciatica problems and have had heavy or prolonged periods for any more than a few months I recommend you see a good practitioner of Chinese medicine for help with the period problems and as a result also reduce your propensity towards sciatica.

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## 9. Being Stressed out

It is well known that stress can have a dramatic effect on the body including the muscular system of the body and back. Stress and tension keep the entire body and especially the back and nerves on overload. A stressful life, pollution and the vast regulations that govern life in our modern society rob people of their organ and overall energies and create a residual stress that can leave you feeling depressed and depleted.

As mentioned above the Kidneys are the organ that is dominant in regards the lower back. The kidney relate to the water element in Chinese Medicine and the negative emotion related to the water element is fear. Tension in the large lumbar muscles that is an expression of fear or anxiety can often be an important contributing factor in lower back conditions including sciatica. So if you have sciatica this could be a factor. A great self help technique for any emotion problem is Emotional Freedom Technique aka EFT. Information on EFT can be easily found by doing a Google search.

There are two main things you can do to reduce the effect of stress on your body, these are, deep relaxation and aerobic exercise.

### *Deep Relaxation*

In the West we have allowed our ambient stress to exceed the healthy carrying capacity of the human organism. I firmly believe that most Westerners are suffering from too much stress simply by living in our society. We have allowed our lives to get out of control just as a child in a soapbox racer, having gone too far down a steep hill without applying the brakes, finds himself careering out of control.

In my experience, most young adult Westerners living in either urban or suburban areas have a wiry pulse. In traditional Chinese Medicine, a wiry pulse is the pulse of the liver. It also signifies chi or energy congestion. The liver is called the temperamental organ in Chinese Medicine and irritability is one of its key symptoms. It is the organ most easily and first affected by stress and frustration. The Liver's job in traditional Chinese medicine is to ensure smooth dispersal of the Qi (energy) which in turn ensures regular blood circulation and regular

peristalsis. When the liver Qi becomes congested due to stress or frustration, the energy fails to circulate freely, the digestion is impaired, and one's mood becomes irritable and pent-up.

Stress is trying to do too much with too little in too little time. In our hurry-up world where everything is so dependent on everything else and where there is little space or room to maneuver, this is the way most of us live our lives.

Unfortunately, this is not just making us crazy and unhappy but it is making us sick as well. The vast majority of my patients all suffer from some species of stress induced disorder.

One person can only change the world so much and one person can only change their life so much without completely dropping out of society altogether. Since the world and our society are the way there are and since there are limits to how much we can change our lifestyle, the key to minimizing the ill effects of all this stress is to change our reaction to it. Happily, this can be done by practicing daily deep relaxation.

Relaxation is an activity. It is a response to stimuli. As such, it is a habit which can be learned and fostered, an ability which can be mastered and honed. All that is necessary, as in developing any new skill or activity, is practice.

A clinic in Shanghai, specializing in the treatment of stress induced disorders through systematic relaxation, states that there are four parameters for developing remedially therapeutic and preventative deep relaxation.

**These four parameters are:**

- A twenty minute threshold.
- Body as well as mental relaxation.
- Lowering of the centre of consciousness to the bottom half of the body.
- Continuous practice for the first one hundred days without missing a single day followed by regular daily practice for the next three years.



So firstly for deep relaxation to be medically therapeutic, it must be practiced for a continuous 20 minutes at a time very similar to aerobic exercise. After thirty minutes of continuous deep relaxation, no significant further health gains or benefits are achieved. In other words, deep relaxation for less than 20 minutes will not result in a marked therapeutic effect, and after 30 minutes, whatever extra gains are registered are minimal and not particularly time efficient.

Secondly, for deep relaxation to have a marked therapeutic effect, it must result in muscular relaxation and not just mental calming. The entire body must relax physically. It is possible to clear the mind and emotionally achieve a state of calm but yet the body and musculature maintain tension and rigidity. Because muscular relaxation is such an important component of therapeutic deep relaxation, it is suggested that it be practiced lying down on one's back rather than sitting up.

Thirdly, it is important that the centre of consciousness, one's sense of self, be lowered to the lower half of the body. In Asia, this means one feels oneself as residing in one's lower abdomen called in Chinese the Qi Hai Tan Tian, the Sea of Qi or Field of Elixir, in the area just below and behind the belly button. This is the energetic centre of the body. Gentle abiding of the mind in this centre helps to regulate and strengthen the energy flow of the entire body. Concentration of one's mind and therefore energy in the head, for instance at the tip of the nose, tends to produce arousal and excitation. Since the energy goes where the mind leads it, centering one's consciousness in the lower abdomen leads the Qi back to its Root and natural storehouse in the body.

And lastly, it is absolutely necessary to do this sort of deep relaxation every day without missing a single day for the first hundred days. One hundred days is three months. If one does this practice for one hundred days following the above four parameters, a number of beneficial results will definitely be obtained:

More red and white blood cells will be manufactured.

One's circulation will improve as experienced by warmer hands and feet.

High blood pressure will come down and low blood pressure will come up to normal.

One's brain waves will show an increased tendency to relaxation throughout the day even when engaged in other activities.

One's appetite, elimination, sleep, energy, and mood will all improve subjectively.

However, for these gains to be registered, one must practice every day for the first one hundred days. If one misses a day any for reason, they should simply begin counting one hundred days again from day one. In order to facilitate such regular practice, it is important that the deep relaxation be done at the same time every day. It does not matter so much what time as long as it is the same time. In other words, it must become a non-discretionary part of one's daily routine.

If one chooses to do this deep relaxation just before bed at night, that is okay as long as one does not fall asleep before one has completed at least 20 minutes of conscious deep relaxation. The brain waves associated with sleep and deep relaxation are different. Therefore, many people find it better to do this exercise at some other time in the day when they are not so likely to fall asleep in the middle of it.

After the first one hundred days of practice, one should continue for the next three years or even their entire life. If one misses a day here and there, no big deal, although the more regular the practice, the more obvious the benefits. It is said in Chinese Medicine, small results in one hundred days, big results in one thousand days. The small results in one hundred days are the changes in one's physical health. The big results in one thousand days are a different personality and a different way of relating to reality - a more relaxed, easy way of relating to oneself and others.

The easiest way to fill this prescription for programmed deep relaxation is to use a guided relaxation or biofeedback tape or CD. There are many of these on the market. One must simply be sure that the tape is a guided progressive deep relaxation tape. Some tapes are sold as relaxation tapes which are just music or natural sounds. Although these also have some value, they are not as therapeutically effective as a guided progressive relaxation tape.

Many people in our hurry-up, stressed-out world say that they cannot relax, that they have difficulty calming their frantic minds. Such persons say that meditation only makes them more anxious because they become frustrated by their mind's tendency to rush this way and that out of control. However, guided deep relaxation tapes, in a sense, supply the mindfulness for one simply does what one is told. If one spaces out, no problem. As soon as one hears the instructions, one will automatically come back to the deep relaxation process.

The importance of such daily, programmed, and systematic deep relaxation cannot be over-emphasized in our stressed-out world today. It is the single most important part in a comprehensive health maintenance regime. Although in some ways it can be the hardest part of this programme to keep together, it is essential for optimal results. Exercise blows off the accumulated steam of stress and circulates the pent-up energy, but daily deep relaxation deals with the problem at its source. It simply aborts the stress response at its inception. When deep relaxation is combined with aerobic exercise, one then has a comprehensive programme to deal with both stress that has accumulated and stress that has not yet arisen. And when deep relaxation, aerobic exercise, and proper diet are combined together, these are the three most essential ingredients in maintaining health and promoting well-being.

### *Exercise*

Adequate exercise is an indispensable part of health maintenance. Hua To, a famous Chinese doctor of the Han dynasty, said, "Running water doesn't go stale: a moving hinge doesn't rot." If one does not get enough exercise, their Qi and Blood will not circulate freely. It will tend to become sluggish and stagnant, accumulating pathologically in some areas and becoming deficient in others. Just as running water seeks its own level, moving Qi also tends to balance itself out. Wang Qing-ren To, a famous Chinese doctor of the Qing dynasty, believed the Circulation of energy and blood to be so important that he advanced the theory that all disease is due to imbalanced circulation of the qi and blood. If there is inadequate exercise, Qi and Blood will also simply not be produced efficiently. The organism as a whole will be sluggish.

By exercise, I mean aerobic exercise. By aerobic exercise, I do not necessarily mean an aerobic callisthenics class. Aerobic exercise simply means exercising in such a way to raise one's resting pulse to near double and keeping it there for at least a continuous 20 minutes. Any activity that results in such a raise in pulse rate without hurting any other part of the body is fine. How one chooses to exercise will depend on their preference, availability of options, current condition, and any weak areas of their body which need to be protected.

Swimming, jogging, callisthenics, skipping rope, rebounding, rowing, cycling, aerobics, racquet sports can all be aerobic exercise as long as they are done vigorously. If someone is out of shape, a brisk walk may be aerobic. For another person in better shape, that same walk would not be aerobic. Each individual can do any exercise which is aerobic for them.

For most people, Hatha Yoga and Tai Chi are not aerobic. That does not mean that they are also not good exercises. However, such softer, more relaxed exercises are better for the older or more debilitated person. For young and middle aged adults in relatively good health, aerobic exercise, combined with deep relaxation (as two separate activities) provide, in my opinion, the best and most efficient alternation of activity and rest.

For older or more debilitated persons, aerobic exercise can be even more debilitating. In China, Tai Chi is mostly for people over 50 and sports and Kung Fu are for the young and middle aged. Amongst young and middle aged adults, circulating the Qi and Blood is relatively more important than generating Qi and Blood. Whereas, the generation of Qi and Blood and gentle circulation are more the issues for the older.

For aerobic exercise to be effective preventively (and remedially), it needs to be done for 20-30 minutes per session once every other day. As with deep relaxation, twenty minutes is the minimum effective threshold and little further benefit is registered cardiovascularly after 30 minutes. If aerobic exercise is not done consistently every other or third day at the least, there will be no cumulative preventive or remedial benefit.

Also as with deep relaxation, aerobic exercise must be done perseveringly over a protracted length of time to really get its full benefit. One of my patients swims a mile every day and has for years. When her friends ask her how she is able to keep this together, she says that since it makes such a difference in her health and well being, how could she not.

Exercise is often boring and if possible one should try to find some exercise which one can do with a certain amount of interest and enthusiasm. There is an inertia which must be overcome both in starting an exercise regime and in beginning to exercise each individual time. However, once one gets into it and the Qi and Blood start to flow, the resistance is overcome and one wants to keep going. Until reaching that point, one simply must persevere.

Exercising early in the morning is best as 1) It jump starts your metabolism and keeps it elevated for up to 24 hours so you burn more calories. 2) You are energised for the day. 3) Many people find it regulates their appetite for the day you may not be as hungry and you make better food choices. 4) It puts you in a healthy mind set. 5) If you exercise and wake at the same time each day the endocrine system and circadian rhythms adjust to that and physiologically some marvelous things happen.

A couple of hours before you wake your body begins to prepare for wake and exercise, why, because it knows you do it every day. You benefit in several ways;

- a) Its much easier to wake up, when you wake at different times each day it confuses your body and thus it is never really prepared to awaken.
- b) Your metabolism and all the hormones involved in activity and exercise begin to elevate while your sleeping thus you feel more alert energised and ready to exercise when you do wake up.
- c) Hormones prepare you body for exercise by regulating blood pressure, heart rate blood flow to muscles etc.
- d) For many people that appointed time each morning becomes something they look forward to its time they have set aside to do something good for themselves to take care of their body mind and soul. Many find it's a great time to think clearly, prey, plain their day or just relax mentally.
- e) Research has shown that exercise increase mental acuity on average it lasts 4 to 10 hours after exercise, no sense in wasting that while your sleeping.
- f) Exercise first thing in the morning is really the only way to ensure something else will not crowd exercise out of your schedule, when your days get hectic exercise usually take's a back seat.
- g) If finding time to exercise is difficult anyone can get up 30 to 60 minutes earlier to exercise if its a priority in your life, if necessary you can go to bed earlier.
- h) Also research has demonstrated people who exercise have a better quality of sleep and thus require less sleep. You'll feel great, so just do it.

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