

## Office Ergonomics – How to Sit with Sciatica

### What is Sciatica?

Sciatica is where the sciatic nerve, which runs from your lower back to your feet, is irritated or compressed. Causes include a slipped disc, spinal stenosis, spondylolisthesis and back injury. It usually gets better in 4 to 6 weeks but can last longer. The condition can also reoccur.

Sciatica is a condition that affects the sciatic nerves, the two largest nerves in the human body. The nerves start from the lower spine (lumbar) and extend through the entire leg right down to the toes. The function of the sciatic nerves is to relay messages from the brain to the legs.

Sciatic pain happens when the root of the nerves become compressed or pinched. The pain can also affect any part of the leg, as the nerve extends down the entire leg. This includes pain in the lower back, calves and upper thighs.

Sciatica is uncomfortable when sat down for long periods and it is important to ensure task breaks and stretches are taken throughout the day to avoid discomfort.

If you suffer from sciatica, learning how to sit is important for relieving symptoms.

If you find it uncomfortable to sit or get out of your chair it is highly recommended that you engage with your medical practitioner and Occupational Health.

This guidance has been produced to support those managing or returning to the workplace with little to no discomfort from sciatica.

The aim of this document is to provide guidance to prevent discomfort at the workstation.

### How Should I sit with Sciatica?

With sciatica, prevention is better than cures. Avoid sitting for long periods of time and take frequent breaks to move your legs. Do frequent stretching exercises for the lower back as well.

When sitting with sciatica, the goal is to do so in a way that minimises pressure under your thighs and legs while maintaining a neutral spine. Therefore you need a good ergonomic chair that supports your thighs and legs and you also need to ensure that frequent breaks are taken to allow for necessary stretching.

The best way to sit with sciatica is

#### 1. Invest in an Ergonomic Chair

A desk side assessment supported by the central Health, Safety & Welfare Team can help to identify the best ergonomic chair for you.

Together a chair would be found with important features such as

- A seat with a highly contoured waterfall edge.



- Adjustable seat depth to ensure there is sufficient distance between seat edge and back of thighs.
- A pronounced lumbar support that cradles the lower back
- Forward tilting seat to reduce pressure under the thighs

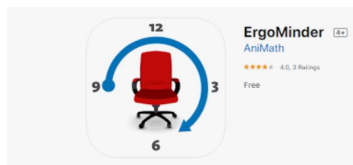
## 2. Take Frequent Breaks

Sciatica pain arises when the nerves are compressed, which can happen after prolonged sitting, regardless of how you sit.

The solution is simple but hard for many people to adhere to – take frequent breaks from sitting.

Get up every 45 minutes at a minimum to take a water break or stretch your body. Set an alarm on my computer/phone as a reminder to take these breaks.

Apps such as Ergo Minder also prompt you to take regular workstation stretches throughout the day.



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## 3. Get Out of the Chair the Right Way

Avoid bending your lower back when getting up from a chair. Bending your back can further irritate the sciatic nerve. Instead slide to the front of the seat and use your leg and arm muscles to push yourself up whilst keeping your back relatively straight. Arms are an important feature on the chair as they will support you. If arms get in the way, consider replacing the arms with arms that foldback.

## 4. Minimise Awkward Postures

Minimize any awkward postures such as bending, twisting or slouching by placing equipment at correct distance – screen/phone/mouse/notebooks close enough to avoid these postures.

- Uncross your legs
- Keep feet flat on the floor / use a footrest
- Keep your back fully against the backrest
- Sit up straight with your ears, shoulders and hips aligned.
- Keep your hips level on the seat pan

## Next Steps

If in discomfort arrange for a referral to Occupational Health.

If little to no discomfort arrange for a formal desk side assessment by contacting the Health, Safety & Welfare Team: [safetyadvice@gov.im](mailto:safetyadvice@gov.im)

## Further Information

NHS Website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sciatica/>

