

These exercises might not be right for you, so please check with your healthcare provider before trying them. You shouldn't feel any pain during or after doing them.

☞ If you're wondering **why this plan kicks off with hip stretches** when it's your calves that are tight, check page 5.

## 1 - Piriformis stretch



**Purpose:** To stretch your piriformis and help your sciatic nerve slide more freely.

**Starting position:** Lie on your back with both knees bent.

**Movement:** Cross your right leg over your left. Place your right hand on your right knee and your left hand on your shin. Pull with both hands at the same time so your knee moves diagonally toward your left shoulder.

You should feel a stretch in your right buttock.

**Check that:** You're also pulling with the hand on your shin – this adds a twist through the hip and deepens the stretch. Make sure your knee moves across your body.

**Aim:** Hold the stretch for 30 seconds, then switch sides. Repeat 3 times on each side.

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## 2 - Glute stretch



**Purpose:** To stretch your gluteal muscles and lower back, and help your sciatic nerve slide more freely.

**Starting position:** Lie on your back with both knees bent.

**Movement:** Place the outside of your right ankle just above your left knee. Use both hands to hold the back of your left thigh and gently pull it towards your chest. If you find it hard to keep your neck in a comfortable position, place a pillow under your head.

You should feel the stretch in your right buttock, thigh, or lower back — depending on which area is the tightest.

**Aim:** Hold the stretch for 30 seconds, then repeat on the other side. Do 3 repetitions per side.

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## 3 - Hamstring stretch / Neural mobilisation



**Purpose:** This gentle hamstring stretch also helps your sciatic nerve slide more freely.

**Starting position:** Lie on your back. Bend one knee and hold the back of your thigh with both hands.

**Movement:** Keep your foot relaxed or point your toes down. Gently straighten your leg until you feel a comfortable stretch at the back of your thigh.

**Aim:** Hold the stretch for 10 seconds, then bend your knee again. Repeat 12 times on each leg.

💡 Your knee may not go very straight if your hamstrings are very tight. Don't force it – it will improve over time.

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## 4 - Calf stretch



**Purpose:** To improve the flexibility of your calf muscles.

**Starting position:** Stand in a stride stance with the leg you want to stretch positioned behind you. Make sure your toes are pointing straight forward.

**Movement:** Keep your back heel on the floor and bend the front knee until you feel a stretch in the calf of your back leg.

**Aim:** Hold the stretch for 30 seconds, then switch legs. Repeat 3 times on each side.

## Why stretches don't always work

I often get people in my clinic complaining of tight and sore calves despite doing regular stretching and foam rolling. The reason for this is that the tightness or discomfort is only a symptom, and it **won't go away if they don't address the cause.**

You can divide the causes of persistent calf pain or tightness into three broad categories:

1. Overuse injuries
2. Calf strains or tears
3. Nerve reasons – if your sciatic nerve is injured or just not free to slide

⚠ The exercises in this plan are not the right ones if you have a calf strain or overuse injury.

## Why the plan starts with hip stretches

Your sciatic nerve runs from your back, through your buttocks, and down the back of your legs. **When it's irritated it can cause a wide variety of symptoms in the calf**, ranging from strange sensations (e.g. tingling), sharp pain, numbness, weakness, cramps, or just a feeling of perpetually tight calves.

If you're experiencing very sharp pain that does not want to subside, weird sensations, numbness or weakness, you've likely got an injury to your lower back. ⚠ **In this case you should consult a physiotherapist** so they can test it properly and provide you with a treatment and exercise plan to help this heal – the exercises in this programme might make your pain worse.

💡 You don't always have to have a back injury to have an irritated sciatic nerve. If your problem is just very tight and sore calves without any funny symptoms, **your sciatic nerve may just be a bit stuck.**

Your nervous system is continuous from your brain to the tips of your toes. When you walk and move, the **nerves slide happily in their sheaths**.

Tight muscles or other structures can sometimes hold on to or press on the nerves and **prevent them from sliding**, causing increased neural tension and symptoms lower down in the limbs.

**A very common culprit** that can affect the sciatic nerve is the piriformis muscle in the buttocks. In some people, the sciatic nerve runs through or under the piriformis and gets held down when this muscle becomes very tight.

Tight buttocks often go hand in hand with a tight lower back and I find it most effective if you improve the flexibility in both areas.

Hope you find this useful!

Maryke  
SIP Founder



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