

VIII. First Step to Stopping Back Pain and/or Sciatica. BEGIN WALKING.

Walking is considered a quick win in the treatment of sciatica. Walking can greatly help the healing process. Walking is going to be highly recommended ONLY if you can do it without increasing your leg pain.

Walking for the Cure of Back Pain

You may have heard of the charity events Walking for the Cure where they raise money for the treatment of breast cancer. Well, we are going to put our own spin on it: Walking for the Cure of Back Pain. It is so simple, but walking can have a healing effect on backs and back pain.

Think of yourself as the tin man in the Wizard of Oz, rusted to the point of no movement. Give him a little oil, he can start moving and is as good as new. Your joints (which your spine has a lot of) love movement and they have their own natural lubrication oil called synovial fluid. The more you walk, the more the joints can self-lubricate. With this, your back muscles can start to strengthen. Your body also puts out its own natural drugs called endorphins, which can help with pain relief. But you say it is painful to walk.

There are 10 possible reasons for the pain:

1. Your posture is incorrect when walking and you are putting increased strain on your back. Posture is always huge. Your spine can handle great loads when it is in the correct position. This is not true when your back is in poor form.

You can use a broom handle or alternative to assess your walking posture. Place the handle in place as follows: your bottom palm is facing out and your top palm is facing forward. The handle should have 3 contact points including the sacrum or pelvis, the mid-back, and the back of your head. If your head is not touching the handle, attempt to correct it. Correct walking posture would have all three contact points touching the handle and all three should remain in contact while walking.



A.

B.

C.

- A. Poor walking posture
- B. Correct walking posture with a stick
- C. Correct walking posture with hands behind back

You can also correct your posture while walking by using your right hand to grasp your left wrist behind your back. In this position pull your shoulders back and straighten your back. Then do a chin tuck. A chin tuck is when you tuck in your chin and work to bring your ears over your shoulders. Your head is not going down or up. It is merely going back, as though someone is going to throw a pie in your face and you are backing your head away from it. Maintain this position and begin to swing your arms normally as you continue walking.

2. You are walking too slowly. Yes! You can overload the spine when walking slowly as compared to a quicker pace. When I hurt my back in the past, my goal is to get back to running by the next day. You would think the “pounding” of running would increase the pain of the spine. However, in my case the self-lubricating nature of the movement AND the increased oxygen to all of the muscles, ligament, tendons, and tissues of the back was more beneficial despite the increase load on the spine.

When you walk too slowly, the tendency is to lean back on the spine and let it settle into a flexed harmful posture. We want you to lead with your chest and build up enough speed so that you are leaning slightly forward. Pick up the

Bob and Brad Sciatica Program: First Step to Stopping Back Pain and/or Sciatica. BEGIN WALKING.

pace of your walking and make sure to swing your arms naturally. The movement of your arms can also serve to increase movement, blood flow, and oxygen to your back. I have had patients who have walked with a stiff back and motionless arms. Their muscles looked tight and therefore less healing was occurring.

3. You are walking too far to start. You may need to work up to it incrementally. Determine how far you can walk before the pain begins. Start in your house and walk across the room. Try to increase the amount of walking you can do each day before the pain begins. If your pain begins immediately, you may need to perform some of the stretches for a few days before re-trying the walking. The stretches and improvement in posture can make a significant difference in pain levels.
4. You may have to decrease the weight on your spine in order to walk. This can be done with a double walking stick, a cane, or double canes to start. AVOID hills and stairs. Stick to flat surfaces.



5. You are taking too long of strides causing a reaction force at your heel which reverberates up your leg and into your spine. The running world has discovered this years ago. They advocate a leaning forward posture with shorter and quicker strides. This causes less impact on the joints and greater speed and efficiency. Along with a quicker pace, be sure to shorten your strides and lean forward. Try to have the front of your foot and your heel hit at nearly the same time. Wear comfortable shoes with adequate cushioning and arch support.



Shorter strides and leaning forward

6. You have been thinking it is bad to walk and your back decides to agree with you. Walking acts as nature's natural lubricant for your back. Take advantage of your body's ability to heal itself.
7. You are not breathing in a relaxed manner. The importance of breathing while trying to manage pain and anxiety is well documented. For example, breathing is the mainstay of meditation techniques and for controlling pain during labor. Before you start walking, take a few deep breaths in which you breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. When blowing out, purse your lips like you are blowing out a candle.

You may also use the breathing 4-4-4-4 technique which is as follows:
inhalation, retention, exhalation, and retention again, all the same length.

Inhale for 4 steps
Retain the breath for 4 steps
Exhale slowly for 4 steps
Retain empty for 4 steps

You may increase or decrease the number of steps for each phase, according to your capacity. For instance, it could be 3-3-3-3 or 6-6-6-6.

Begin walking and continue relaxed breathing. Good posture will also help assist your breathing.

8. You are not decompressing the spine. One method for decompressing the spine is to lean onto the back of a park bench or chair with a similar back

Bob and Brad Sciatica Program: First Step to Stopping Back Pain and/or Sciatica. BEGIN WALKING.

height. Allow the back to relax and continue for 10 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times as needed. For further methods on decompressing the spine, check out our video in this series entitled “**How to Decompress the Spine for Back Pain or Sciatica.**”



Decompression

9. You may have to build up your walking distance in an incremental fashion. Gradually increase walking distances from day to day.
10. You may need to increase or decrease the arch in your back. You also may need to tighten your abdomen at times for support. See if either helps to shut down the pain maker.

Also note, be careful when walking dogs on a leash. The constant or even sporadic pull on the leash by your pet could be causing a torque on your back resulting in pain. Try walking without your dog and compare it to when you do. If you have increased pain with the pet, you will need to build up your core trunk muscles first before resuming pet walks.