

Stretching Exercises for Piriformis

Several of the stretching exercises commonly prescribed to treat sciatica symptoms from piriformis muscle problems include:

Supine piriformis stretches:

- Lie on the back with the legs flat. Pull the affected leg up toward the chest, holding the knee with the hand on the same side of the body and grasping the ankle with the other hand. Trying to lead with the ankle, pull the knee towards the opposite ankle (Figure 1) until stretch is felt. Do not force ankle or knee beyond stretch. Hold stretch for 30 seconds, then slowly return to starting position. Aim to complete a set of three stretches.
- Lie on the floor with the legs flat. Raise the affected leg and place that foot on the floor outside the opposite knee. Pull the knee of the bent leg directly across the midline of the body using the opposite hand or a towel, if needed (Figure 2), until stretch is felt. Do not force knee beyond stretch or to the floor. Hold stretch for 30 seconds, then slowly return to starting position. Aim to complete a set of three stretches.
- Lie on the floor with the affected leg crossed over the other leg at the knees and both legs bent. Gently pull the lower knee up towards the shoulder on the same side of the body. (Figure 3) until stretch is felt. Hold stretch for 30 seconds, then slowly return to starting position. Aim to complete a set of three stretches.

Practical Point

Stretching the piriformis muscle a few times a day, especially when combined with hamstring stretches will prevent tightening of the lower back and relieve tension from hip to foot.

Buttocks stretch for the piriformis muscle:

- Begin on all fours. Place the affected foot across and underneath the trunk of the body so that the affected knee is outside the trunk. Extend the non-affected leg straight back behind the trunk and keep the pelvis straight. Keeping the affected leg in place, scoot the hips backwards towards the floor and lean forward on the forearms (Figure 4) until deep stretch is felt. Do not force body to floor. Hold stretch for 30 seconds, then slowly return to starting position. Aim to complete a set of three stretches.

Figure 1:
Piriformis Stretch –
Supine

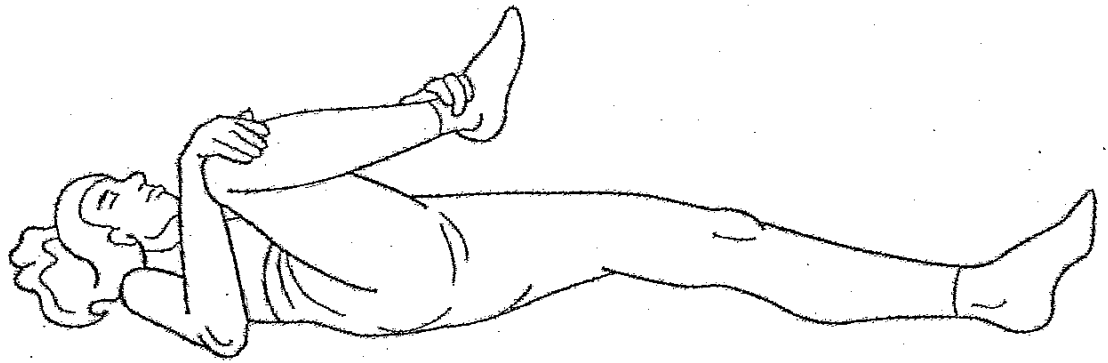


Figure 2:
Piriformis Stretch –
Supine

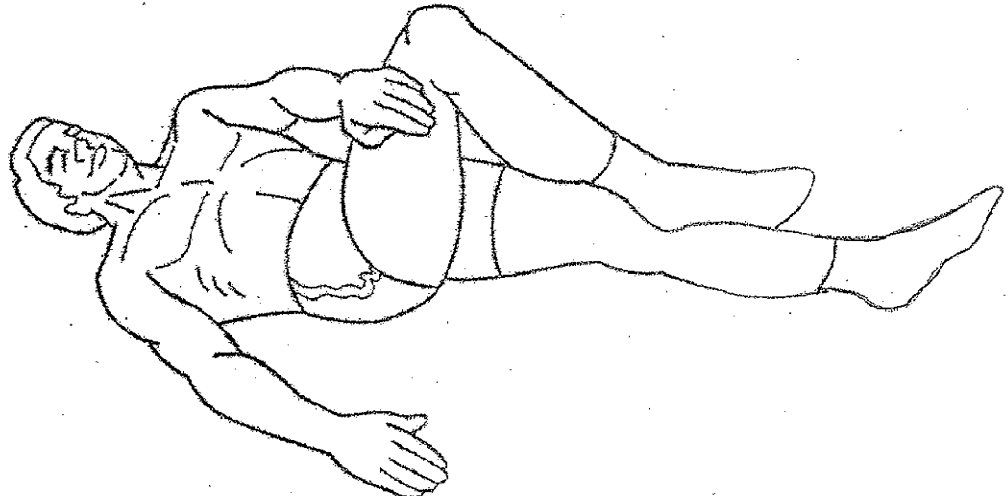


Figure 3:
Piriformis Stretch –
Hip and Knee (Supine)

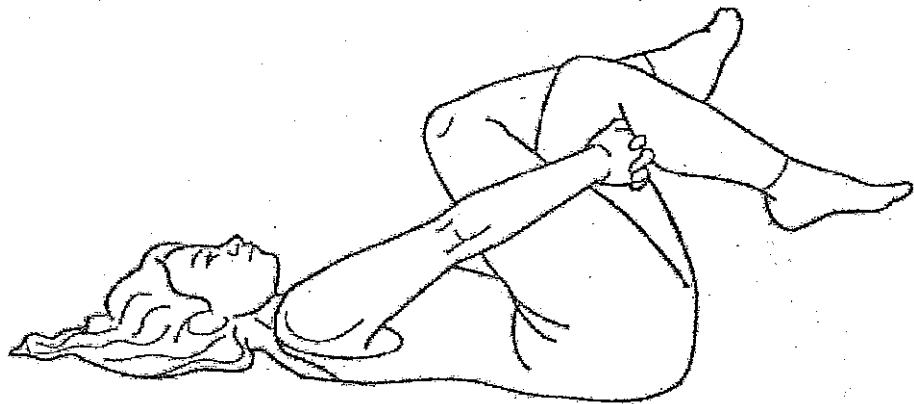


Figure 4:
Piriformis Stretch-
Buttocks

