Visual summary
Managing low back pain and sciatica
A brief overview the new NICE guidelines, from the perspective of a patient presenting in primary care.

Consider alternatives
Exclude specific causes of low back pain, for example:
- Cancer
- Infection
- Trauma
- Inflammatory disease
- Cauda equina

Referral

Imaging
Only consider imaging:
- In specialist care
- If likely to alter management

Assess likely recovery outcomes
The complexity and intensity of treatment may vary depending on how likely it is that the patient will have a good functional outcome.

Consider using risk stratification—such as the STarT Back risk assessment tool

Possible indicators of poor outcomes
- Fear / pain avoidance
- Low mood
- Job dissatisfaction
- Ongoing litigation

Good
Likely outcomes
Poor

Provide self management information
Self management is important for all patients, even those with acute symptoms and/or sciatica.

Information on nature of pain
Encouragement to continue activities

To manage a specific episode

Managing acute sciatica

Group exercise
Manual therapy
Psychological therapy
Combined physical + psychological programme

Consider pain relief options

- Paracetamol
  - Not effective alone

- NSAIDs*
  - Consider oral NSAIDs

- Weak opioids
  - If NSAID ineffective / not tolerated / contraindicated

* NSAIDs = non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

Do not offer acupuncture

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