



## Back Pain

### What is it?

Back pain is usually felt in your back and/or your buttock area, sometimes it can refer pain down your leg, and you may experience some pins and needles and/or numbness. Back pain is very common, and is rarely due to anything serious – even if the pain is very bad. Most people will experience back pain during their life. Most episodes of back pain will settle within 6 weeks this can be longer, especially if pain is felt into the leg.

### How does it happen?

Sometimes a pain may develop immediately after you lift something heavy, or after an awkward twisting movement. Your posture can cause pain. Sometimes you may have pain with no specific cause.

### What do you need to look out for?

It is important to inform your physiotherapist or doctor **immediately** if you suddenly develop the following:

- Difficulty passing or controlling urine
- Numbness or pins and needles of the back passage or genitals, or weakness of both legs
- Unsteadiness on feet
- Severe pain which gets worse rather than better, and/or you are unwell with back pain

### What should you do?

**Limit Bed Rest** - Pain might force you to rest but lots of bed rest is not a good treatment for your back pain. Try to limit bed rest to 1-2 days as it can make you stiff, less fit and depressed and these factors can make your pain worse.

- **Stay as active as possible and return to normal activities as soon as possible.** People with back pain who get active, and back to normal activities as soon as possible (including work) are likely to recover more quickly and are less likely to develop chronic (persistent) back pain compared to those who rest and do little exercise. You may have to put up with some pain whilst getting back to normal activities, but remember, pain with normal movement is not a sign of damage or harm.
- **Manage Your Pain and Posture** - Any medication that you take should be discussed with your GP or pharmacist. Paracetamol, Aspirin or Ibuprofen could be useful whilst you are getting back to normal activities. Try to maintain good posture. Use a rolled up towel in the small of your back when sitting or driving if this is comfortable, and try and avoid sitting for long periods.
- **X-rays or scans of the back are often not helpful** and do not show anything abnormal if you have simple low back pain. They may be advised if nerve root pain persists or is severe, or if another serious cause of the pain is suspected.
- Surgery and injections are only very rarely needed
- It is important with back pain not to worry too much. **People, who keep positive and active, cope better and recover quicker!**

Physical treatments provided by your physiotherapist, such as manipulation, may provide some short-term pain-relief. Treatment may vary, and the situation should be reviewed by a professional if the pain becomes worse, the symptoms change, or if significant pain persists beyond 4-6 weeks.

### What will happen?

About 9 in 10 cases the pain has gone or has greatly eased within six weeks. However, once the pain has gone it is common to have further bouts of pain (recurrences) from time to time in the future. Also, it is common to have minor pains 'on and off' for quite some time after an initial bad bout of pain. In a small number of cases the pain persists for several months or longer (chronic back pain).

### Can you prevent it?

Evidence suggests that the best way to prevent bouts of low back pain is simply to keep active, and to exercise regularly. This means general fitness exercise such as walking, running, swimming etc. It is also sensible to be 'back aware'. For example, do not lift objects when you are in an awkward twisting posture, keep objects close to your body when lifting, be aware of your sitting posture. Your physiotherapist can assist with exercise and advice specific for your problem.

## Simple Exercises for lower back pain

General fitness exercise such as walking, running and swimming when done 3 – 4 times per week can be very helpful in managing your back pain and preventing a recurrence. Initially you may only be able to manage 5 – 10 minutes, try to gradually build this up to 30 – 40 minutes and seek advice from your doctor if you have any other health problems.

Whether you do walking, swimming, Pilates, or any other type of exercise current research suggests there is not much difference in the beneficial effects of different types of exercise. Choose the one that you enjoy and are likely to continue to do on a regular basis.

- Start with a manageable amount of exercise, continue to do this regularly, and then gradually build up the amount of time you do the exercise and the number of times you are doing this per week.
- It is normal to feel some muscle fatigue and generalised muscle soreness when you first start doing exercise even when you do not have back pain. You should not experience acute exacerbation of your symptoms at the time or for a prolonged period after doing the exercises.
- If you have leg pain, pins and needles or numbness associated with your back symptoms the exercise may provoke these symptoms, if it makes these symptoms much worse at the time then stop doing them and seek further advice.

In addition to the types of exercise outlined above below are some simple exercises you can try that might help to keep your back mobile and so help your pain, do approximately 2 sets of each 1 – 3 times per day:

Lying on your back with knees together and bent.

Slowly roll your knees from side to side keeping your upper trunk still.

Repeat 10 times.



Lying with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Lift your knees towards your chest.

Place your hands behind both knees and gently draw them towards your chest. Hold 10 secs.

Repeat 5 times.



Start in the crawling position as shown.

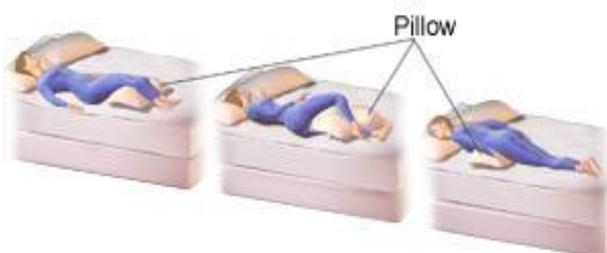
Leading with your pelvis arch your back up so it is rounded and your head is down like an "angry cat". Then relax and let your back arch in the other direction so your back and stomach sag towards the floor. Do these movements gently with relaxed breathing.

Repeat 10 times in each direction.



## Sleeping:

When the pain is severe you might find it difficult to sleep. Having adequate medication as advised by your GP can help and below are some positions that might assist you getting more comfortable.



*If you have persisting problems sleeping due to severe pain, particularly if you are unable to lay flat on your back, and this is not eased by modifying your sleeping position, you should consult your GP.*