

# Low Back Pain

**Back pain, particularly low back pain, is very common. It usually improves within a few weeks but can sometimes last longer or keep coming back.**

## Back pain can have many causes

**It is not always obvious what causes back pain. Sometimes this type of back pain is referred to as non-specific back pain as there is no one specific cause but your symptoms may be due to a combination of factors.**

A small number of people may get sciatica (nerve pain) with back pain. Sciatica is caused by physical or chemical irritation of one of the nerve roots in the lower back. It can cause leg pain, numbness or pins and needles.

Less than 1 in 100 people with low back pain have symptoms that need urgent medical attention. These are known as red flag symptoms:

**You should ask for an urgent GP appointment or phone 111 if you have back pain and:**

- A high temperature
- You have lost weight without trying
- There is a lump or swelling in your back or your back has changed shape
- The pain does not improve with resting or is worse at night
- The pain is worse when sneezing, coughing or pooing
- The pain is coming from the top of your back (between your shoulder blades) rather than the lower back

**You should go to A+E straight away if you have back pain and:**

- Pain, tingling, weakness or numbness in both legs
- Numbness or tingling around your genitals or buttocks
- Difficulty peeing
- Loss of bladder or bowel control (peeing or pooing yourself)
- Chest pain
- It started after a serious accident, such as a car accident

# Wider Health And Back Pain

What is happening in your life has a large bearing on your pain experience. There are many factors that can influence back pain and often a combination of these are involved.

They could be:

- **Physical factors:** such as muscle strain or moving differently to try and 'protect' your back
- **Psychological factors:** including a fear of damage or not getting better, feeling down or being stressed.
- **Social factors:** such as stressful life events or difficult relationships at work or home
- **General health and lifestyle factors:** not getting enough physical activity, smoking, not getting enough good quality sleep, being overweight, other health conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

Caring for your wider health should not be underestimated when it comes to your recovery.

## Helping Your Recovery

There are several things you can do to help reduce your pain and speed up your recovery.

- **Keep active.** There is clear evidence that exercise and activity is the best treatment for back pain. Resting and avoiding painful activities for more than a day or 2 might make your pain last longer. An important message is 'hurt does not equal harm'.
- **Take medication.** Anti-inflammatory medication such as Ibuprofen or Naproxen can be helpful and may help you to remain active. Paracetamol on its own is not recommended for back pain but it may be used with another pain killer. You should check with your GP or Pharmacist what pain medication is right for you.
- **Apply heat or ice to the area.** Try using an ice pack wrapped in a damp towel or alternatively place a warm water bottle (in a cover) on the area. Use either of these regularly for up to 20 minutes at a time. Do not use ice or heat if you have any loss of skin sensation or damage to the skin.
- **Carry out exercises and stretches for your back.** You will find some suggestions of gentle exercises at the end of this leaflet. Swimming, cycling and short walks are good ways of keeping up your fitness while you still have back pain. If your pain levels are high, build up your activities slowly as symptoms allow.
- **Relaxation.** Simple relaxation techniques can help manage low back pain and the stress that is linked to the pain. Try to find some time to practice relaxation each day if you find it helpful. Other things might work better for you such as reading, singing or lying in a hot bath.
- **Work.** Staying in work or returning to work quickly has been shown to help recovery. If work activities make your pain worse, it is important to tell your work manager. It might be possible to change your work activities in the short term to help you return to work sooner.

# Exercises

**Your back is designed for normal movement, the sooner you get back to normal activity, the sooner your back will feel better. Here are some exercises to help you do this.**

If any of these exercises make your symptoms worse then reduce the frequency or stop them and consult your doctor or physiotherapist. If after 4-6 weeks your back pain is not improving, go back and see your doctor or physiotherapist. A delay in recovery rarely means that it is a serious problem, it is more likely that you may need some extra support to manage your pain.

1. Lay on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Rotate your knees sideways while keeping them together. The rotation must come from your hips/pelvis and lower back.

Rotate your arms toward the opposite side with your lower arm stretched and the other arm on your chest.

Switch sides every time.

**Reps: 10 Frequency: Twice daily**



2. Start on all fours with hands underneath the shoulders. Lift the head and chest simultaneously while letting the stomach sink and the lower back arch to perform the cat.

Round the back and let the head and neck drop while trying to get the head and pelvis as close as possible.

Do not force the end range of motion.

**Reps: 10 Frequency: Twice daily**

3. Lie on your back with your legs straight. Bend one knee and bring it to your chest, holding it with your hands.

Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat.

**Reps: 10 Frequency: Twice daily**



4. Lie on your back with your knees bent. Tuck your tailbone under and roll into bridge; lifting your hips off the ground until your trunk is aligned with your legs.

Slowly return to the initial position and repeat.

**Reps: 3 sets of 8 Frequency: Three time per week**

