

Low back pain

Information and advice

Back pain is very common, and most people often recover within six weeks. Our backs are designed to keep moving, and there a number of things you can do to help with your recovery.

Signs and symptoms

Generally, back pain is not caused by a serious condition or illness, and may get better over time. However, if you develop any of the following symptoms, consult your doctor immediately:

- 'Pins and needles' in both of your legs
- Numbness between the tops of your legs or genital region
- Trouble controlling your toilet habits
- Increasing weakness in your legs

Pain control

If you have sudden back pain, there are things you can do to control the problem such as:

- Take painkillers regularly for the first day or two, and speak to your GP if you need to take them for longer
- Avoid any heavy lifting
- Give yourself more time if you do need to move – don't rush
- Use an ice pack wrapped in a damp towel, or a warm water bottle in a cover on the painful area for up to 20 minutes each time

Sleeping

Use whatever position you feel is most comfortable, and use pillows to support you if necessary.

Try a firm base under the mattress or put the mattress on the floor. Relaxing can help with pain relief, but try to avoid staying in bed too long in the morning. Getting up and moving can help with your recovery.

Sitting

Use an upright chair and try using a rolled towel in the small of your back for comfort. It may help to sit with your back against the back of the chair and your feet on the floor.

Driving

When you're in the car, adjust your seat and use a rolled towel in the small of your back for comfort and support. Don't poke your chin forward or grip the wheel too tightly. Take regular breaks on long journeys, and make sure to walk and gently stretch when you get out. Gentle neck and shoulder movements may also help ease tense muscles and stiff joints.

Fitness and activity

Physically fit people generally get less back pain and recover faster. Swimming, cycling or short walks are good ways of keeping up your fitness, even while you still have backache. When you have pain, take you time to build up your activities slowly over several days.

At work

Stay at work if possible, otherwise return to your job as soon as you can, even if you still have some discomfort. If standing for a long time, it may help to put one foot on a foot rest. If you work in an office, make sure your chair fits you and supports your back. Arrange your desk so that you can reach things like your computer and phone without twisting your back.

Manual work, gardening and housework

If you're still doing activities, give yourself enough time and take regular breaks. When lifting, it may help to use your legs more and to kneel down to do things rather than bending forward.

Exercises

Your back is designed for 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. Start gently with the exercises, and repeat two or three times a day

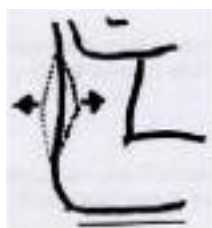
- Lay down, and pull one knee in to your chest until you feel a comfortable stretch in your lower back and buttocks
- Repeat 5 times for each leg



- Lie down, bend your knees and roll them from side to side slowly. Make sure to keep the top half of your body flat on the floor
- Repeat 5 times on each side



- Sit up with your bottom to the back of your chair
- Keep your feet flat on the floor, and push your lower back into the back of the chair, and then away from the chair
- Repeat 5 times



- Stand up and slide your right hand down the outside of your right leg
- Return to the top, and do the same on your left
- Repeat 5 times each side



If any of these exercises make your symptoms worse, slow down or take a break. If after 4-6 weeks your back ache isn't improving, go back and see your GP. A delay in recovery rarely means there's a serious problem. It's more likely that you may need some extra help to manage your back pain.

How to contact us

If you need to contact us or require further information...

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