



The best way to deal with back pain

Back pain is common and can be very painful but, serious or permanent damage is rare.

The Facts

- Most back pain is not due to any serious disease
- The acute pain usually improves within days or a few weeks, at least enough to get on with your life. The long term outlook is good
- Sometimes aches and pains can last for quite a long time. But that doesn't mean its serious. It does usually settle eventually-even though its frustrating that no one can predict exactly when! Most people can get going quite quickly, even while they still have some pain.
- About half the people who get back pain will get it again within a couple of years and that still does not mean that it is serious. Between episodes most people return to normal activities with little if any pain. What you do in the early stages is very important. Rest for more than one or two days usually does not help and may actually prolong pain and disability.
- Your back is designed for movement. It needs a lot of movement. The sooner you get moving and doing your ordinary activities as normally as possible, the sooner you will feel better.
- The people who cope the best with back pain are those who stay active and get on with life despite the pain.
- Back pain shouldn't cripple you so don't let it!
- The sooner you get on with your life-the sooner you will feel better (highlighted)

The spine is one of the strongest parts of the body and gives us a great deal of flexibility and strength. It is made of solid bony blocks joined by discs to give it strength and flexibility. It is reinforced by strong ligaments, and surrounded by large and powerful muscles that protect it.

- It is surprisingly difficult to damage your spine
- Regardless of what you might have heard only a few people with back pain have a slipped disc or a trapped nerve.
- Even then, it usually gets better on its own and very few people ever need surgery.
- X-rays and MRI scans don't usually help in ordinary back pain and may even be misleading. Doctor's sometimes mention 'degeneration' which sounds frightening, but it's not damage. These are the normal changes with age – just like getting grey hair.

Bed Rest Is Bad For Backs

We now know that bed rest for more than a day or two is the worst possible treatment, because in the long term it actually prolongs the pain;

- You get stiff
- Your muscles get weak
- Your bones get weaker
- You lose physical fitness
- You get depressed
- The pain feels worse
- It is harder and harder to get going



Activity Is Good

Our bodies are built for movement and you need regular physical activity to remain fit and healthy.

Physical activity;

- Develops your muscles
- Keeps you supple
- Gives you stronger bones
- Makes you fitter and feel better
- Releases endorphins (your body's natural painkillers) which improve pain and make you feel happier.

You have two choices: rest and get worse, or get active and recover.

You should not fall into the trap of thinking it will be easier in a week or two, next month, next year. It won't!

The sooner you get active, the sooner your back will feel better!

What can I do to help myself?

Painkillers

Do not hesitate to take painkillers if you need them. You can safely mask the pain to get active because your body will not let you do any harm. Paracetamol is the safest and simplest pain killer. Anti-inflammatory tablets such as ibuprofen, can also help.

- Simple over the counter painkillers are often the most effective for back pain.
- Take the full recommended dose and take them regularly every 4-6 hours.
- Do not wait until your pain is out of control.
- You should take the painkillers for a few days, but you may need to take them for a week or two.
- Few people will require anything stronger.

Do not take Ibuprofen or Aspirin if you are pregnant or if you have asthma, indigestion, or an ulcer. Please see your doctor or Pharmacist if you have any known allergies to medication.

EXERCISE

Exercise is the most important way that you can help yourself if you have back pain. If you stop being active for a long time, the muscles in your back become weak and you become less fit, and this can make your back pain worse. Research shows that regular exercise leads to shorter and less frequent episodes of back pain.

It's better to choose a form of exercise that you enjoy as you are more likely to stick to it. Any regular exercise that helps to make you flexible and stronger and increases your stamina is good, e.g.

- Walking
- Swimming
- Dancing/Yoga/Keep fit
- Most daily activities and hobbies in fact

Exercise might make your back feel a bit sore at first but it doesn't cause any harm-so don't let it put you off!

Start off slowly and gradually increase the amount of exercise you do. Try taking some painkillers beforehand too. Over time, your back will get stronger and more flexible and this should reduce the pain.

Heat & Cold

Heat and ice packs can be used for short term relief of pain and to relax muscle tension. In the first 48 hours you can try a cold pack on the affected area for 5-10 minutes – this can be a bag of frozen peas rapped in a damp tea towel. Others may prefer heat – a hot water bottle, a bath or a shower.



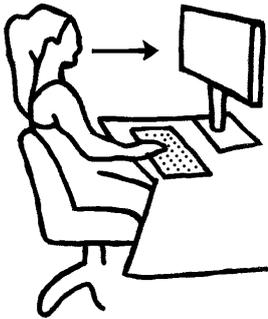
Posture

Try to maintain good posture when sitting at home, at work or in the car (see diagrams below). Staying in awkward positions while working or driving, for example will affect the soft tissues in you back and will increase your pain or your recovery time.

Sitting

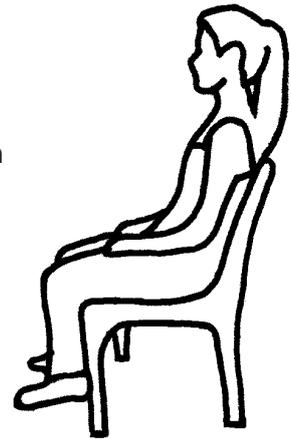
Choose a chair that is comfortable for you – experiment.

Try some support in the small of your back. Remember to get up and stretch regularly.



Desk Work

Adjust your chair or table, and position of the computer screen, so that you don't have to slump. Have your work in front of you, not to the side.



Driving

Use cushions to experiment if you need a higher seat or support in the small of your back. Stopping regularly to stretch and have a walk will help.



Lifting correctly

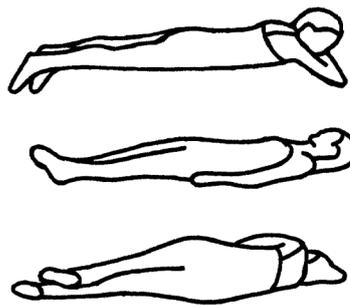
Always think before you lift! Do not lift more than you need to. Keep the load close to your body. Do not twist while you are lifting but turn with your feet.

You should avoid bending forwards or stooping. Work surfaces at proper heights help prevent this.



Sleeping

Some people find that a firmer mattress helps – or you can try chipboard under the mattress-Experiment. Try taking your painkillers an hour before you go to bed.



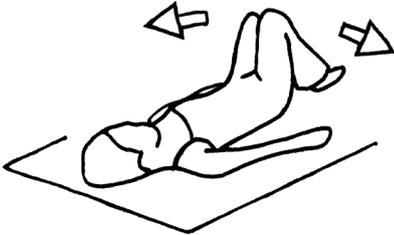
How To Stay Active

Walking

You can walk for as long as you feel comfortable. There are no restrictions to walking! If you take a short walk every day, you can gradually increase the distance.

Exercises

These exercises are designed to stretch, strengthen and stabilise the structures that support your back. As with any physical activity it's normal to feel some aches in your muscles, especially if you've just started doing more exercise, but you should stop if you get any joint pain that doesn't go away quickly.



Exercise 1: Knee rolling

Lie on your back, hands by your side. Bend your knees and, keeping your feet on the floor, roll your knees to one side, slowly. Stay on one side for 10 seconds. Repeat three times each side.

Exercise 2: Bridging

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet on the floor.

Gently draw your lower tummy muscles.

Lift your pelvis and lower back (gradually vertebra by vertebra) off the floor. Hold the position for five seconds.

Lower down slowly returning to starting position. Repeat 5 times.

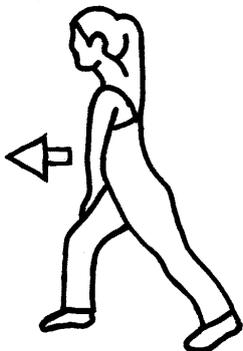
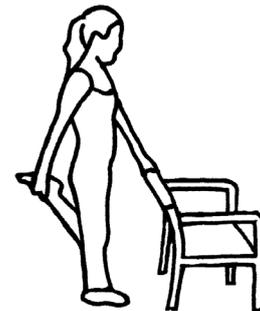


Exercise 3: Knee to chest.

Lie on your back with knees bent and your feet on the floor. Bring one knee up and pull it gently into your chest for five seconds. Repeat for up to five times on each side.

Exercise 4: One leg stand – Front (stretches front thigh)

Steady yourself with one hand on a chair. Bend one leg up behind you. Hold your foot for 10 seconds and repeat three times each side.



Exercise 5: Deep lunge (stretches muscles in front of thigh and abdomen) Kneel on one knee, the other foot in front. Lift your back knee up making sure you keep looking forwards. Hold for five seconds and repeat three times each side

