

# Acute back pain

## Emergency Department Patient Information Leaflet

### Introduction

This leaflet is designed to help you manage your lower back pain. It includes information about what causes back pain, how it is treated and what to do when you get home. Within the first two weeks of an acute episode of pain, most people will report a significant improvement in their symptoms with almost 85 per cent of people fully recovered by three months.

### What causes back pain?

Most acute back pain is the result of a simple strain or sprain.

Occasionally back pain can be due to a nerve or disc irritation; this can cause additional symptoms such as numbness or a tingling in one leg or foot. These symptoms can be normal for this type of back pain.

It can also be affected by sustained postures, stress and mood.

All of these causes will resolve well in the majority of people with simple self-management techniques and lifestyle advice.

## How is back pain treated?

The following tips may help reduce your backache and speed up your recovery:

- Most back pain will resolve by remaining active and completing your daily activities. It is likely that resting for long periods could increase your muscle stiffness, making movement harder when you start again.
- Try exercises and stretches for back pain. Other activities such as walking, swimming, yoga and pilates may also help.
- Use hot or cold compression packs for short-term relief which you can buy from a pharmacy. Using a hot water bottle and a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in a cloth will work just as well.
- You can take painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, if you can take them (always read the label; do not exceed the recommended dose). Please consult your clinician or a pharmacist if you are unsure about what to use.

**Only a small percentage of those who have a back injury will go on to develop long lasting symptoms and require ongoing treatment.**

## What can I do to help myself?

- Do regular back exercises and stretches.
- Stay active.
- Avoid sitting for too long when driving or at work.
- Change your posture often when completing daily activities.
- There is no perfect sleeping position, ensure that you feel supported by your mattress and pillows.

- Lose weight if you are overweight by eating a healthy diet and doing regular exercise. Being overweight can increase your risk of developing back pain.
- Below are some examples of exercises that may help to reduce pain in the acute stages:



### **1. Prone trunk extension on forearms**

Lie on your stomach with your forearms under your shoulders.

Push your chest up with your forearms, extending in the lower back.

Keep your hips pressed in to the floor and your legs straight.



### **2. Lower trunk rotation**

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

Extend your arms out to the sides and keep your shoulders on the mat at all times.

Keeping your knees together, drop them down to one side, rotating your torso.

Return to the starting position and allow your knees to fall to the opposite side.

Only drop your knees as far as you go comfortably.

You may want to hold the stretch on each side.



### 3. Supine knee hugs

Lie on your back.

Draw one foot up and then the other.

Bring one knee in towards your chest and then the other, using your hands for assistance to curl yourself in to a ball.

### 4. Sitting pelvic tilts

Sit upright in a chair with your weight through your seat bones.

Move forwards so your back is away from the back of the chair.

Separate your feet and knees and place both hands on top of your knees.

From this position, slowly roll back slumping your weight through your tail bone.

Your shoulders will round but keep your gaze straight ahead.

Roll forwards again on to your sitting bones, opening up the chest and shoulders as you go.

Repeat this cycle at a steady pace.



Images and information taken from Physitrack®

## Seek help immediately

Seek immediate help from the Emergency Department if you develop any of the following:

- A recent onset of significant pain and / or a feeling of pins and needles / numbness in **both legs**.
- Loss of feeling / pins and needles between your inner thighs or genitals.
- Numbness in or around your back passage or buttocks.
- Altered feeling when using toilet paper to wipe yourself.
- Increasing difficulty when you try to urinate.
- Increasing difficulty when you try to stop or control your flow of urine.
- Loss of sensation when you pass urine.
- Leaking of urine or recent use of pads.
- Not knowing when your bladder is either empty or full.
- Inability to stop a bowel motion or leaking.
- Loss of sensation when you pass a bowel motion.
- Change in ability to achieve an erection or ejaculate.
- Loss of sensation in genitals during sexual intercourse.

These symptoms could be signs of cauda equina syndrome. This is a rare but serious condition, requiring early medical intervention.

## Follow-up care

You should not usually need any follow-up care. However, if you have queries or concerns when you get home, please contact your GP or NHS 111.

More information is available at:

[www.csp.org.uk/yourback](http://www.csp.org.uk/yourback)

<https://patient.info> – bones / joints / muscles – information on back and spine pain.

## Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following weblink:

### **NHS Choices**

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Back-pain/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please speak to one of our nurses. If you need help when you return home, please contact your GP.

### **This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/accident-emergency/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

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