

Acute Low Back Pain



Patient Information

What is low back pain?

Back pain is very common – four out of five of us will suffer one or more episodes of back pain at some point in our life.

Most back pain is not due to any serious disease or damage to the spine. Onset can be sudden and usually settles within a few days but it can take a few weeks or months to recover.

This information includes advice about the best things to do to aid recovery. In some cases, the back pain may improve without going away completely or it may resolve but recur. This does not usually indicate any cause for concern but you might want to consult your GP or physiotherapist about the best way to manage the symptoms.

What you do in the early stages is very important. The back is designed for movement and staying active will help speed up your recovery and prevent further back problems. If your pain isn't improving your GP can refer you to a Physiotherapist. In most cases it is not helpful to do any x-rays or scans.



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Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
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Warning signs

If you have severe pain, which gets worse over several weeks, or if you are unwell, for example have a fever, you should contact your doctor or call NHS 111. A rare but serious back condition, Cauda Equina Syndrome, can lead to permanent damage or disability and will need to be managed by an Emergency Specialist Spinal Team.

If you develop any of the symptoms below you should see your doctor/attend A&E **immediately**.

Cauda Equina Syndrome Warning Signs:

- 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 urine or recent need to use pads
- Not knowing when your bladder is either full or empty
- Inability to stop a bowel movement 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

Managing an episode of Back Pain

Keep Active

- Back pain can be extremely painful but it is important to keep moving as you feel able to. Exercise is usually safe to do and makes an important contribution to recovery. If your back pain is too severe to allow you to move and exercise, ask a healthcare professional for advice. In most cases they will be able to reassure you and advise on appropriate exercise and activity.

- Keeping active and maintaining your normal everyday activities will help you recover more quickly from back pain. Walking and swimming are good forms of regular exercise.
- Try to stay at work or return as soon as possible even if your back pain is still present. The longer you stay off work, the harder it can become to return to work. If you feel your work is difficult or unsafe to do because of your pain, speak to your manager as you may be able to alter your role temporarily.
- Stay mobile to avoid becoming stiff and try to change position at least every 20 minutes.

Pain Relief

- Simple pain killers can be used to help manage your pain. Ask your local pharmacist for advice. Please follow the instructions on the packet carefully.
- Your GP can prescribe stronger medication if required.
- You can apply cold or heat packs over the painful area for 10 minutes for short-term relief. Make sure you protect your skin from burns with a towel.

Posture

- Prolonged periods in static postures are likely to cause an increase in pain. To prevent onset of back pain it is important to move regularly, not sitting for longer than 20 minutes at a time.
- Every 20 minutes, try to stand up, move around and stretch. Try to monitor your activities to ensure you are not spending long periods in the same posture. Studies have shown that sitting for over 4 hours a day increases fat content of the muscles around the spine, and narrows the discs.
- If you are concerned about sustained postures at your work place, ask your employer for an occupational health review and ergonomic assessment.

Lifestyle Management

- Stress, anxiety and depression related to work or home life can contribute to lower back pain so it is important to manage your mental health.
- Being an ideal weight reduces the stress on your lower back, and reducing fat cells has proven to reduce inflammation in our body.
- Ensure you are getting a good night's sleep to allow your tissues to heal; this is important for your recovery.
- Smoking has been linked with disc degeneration, back pain and slower healing times. Seek advice from your GP for help with smoking cessation.

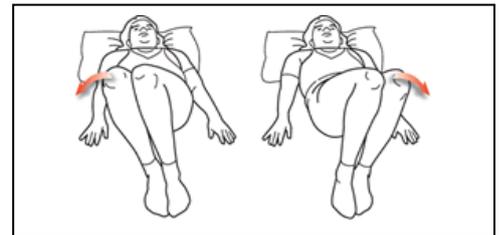
Exercises

- It is important to gradually return to your usual activities as you feel able. Studies don't suggest that any particular form of exercise is superior to another for back pain, so you could gradually restart any gentle exercise and activity which feels comfortable for your back, preferably something you enjoy. You should build up the exercise time or intensity gradually as things improve. If unsure, ask a physiotherapist or your GP.
- The exercises below are not a definitive list and it is more important to return to your usual activities as able, but if you are struggling with this, you could try these exercises as a starting point to help get your back moving.

Lumbar rotation

Lying on your back, gently roll your knees side to side in a slow controlled way and as far as you feel comfortable to go.

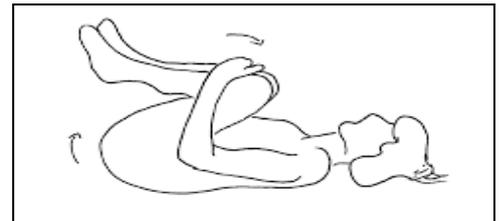
Repeat 10 times to each side



Lumbar Flexion

In lying, hug your knees to your chest. Hold for a few seconds and then repeat.

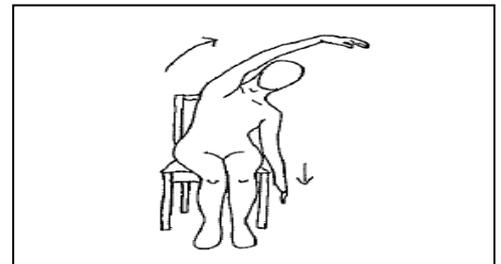
Repeat 10 times



Side flexion stretch

Sitting or standing, bend to the side as far as you feel comfortable to go. Do not lean forwards.

Repeat 10 times to each side.



If you find the exercises are making the pain worse stop doing them and speak to your GP or Physiotherapist.

Further Information

If you would like to seek the advice of a physiotherapist, there are a number of options within Wiltshire. Please speak to your GP practice about the ways you can be referred.

Useful websites:

<https://www.activewiltshire.org.uk/>

Here you will find information on improving your activity level and details of what is available in your local area.

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/public-health-weight>

Here you will find information about weight management options in your local area.

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/public-health-trainers>

Health Trainers work on a one to one basis to support behaviour change and improve health. They concentrate on behaviours associated with ill health including unhealthy eating often linked to obesity, stop or reduce smoking, sensible drinking, increasing physical activity, building confidence and motivation to change and boosting self-esteem, they also signpost and support clients to access other services and activities where appropriate.

Safeguarding

Wiltshire Health and Care has a strong commitment to care that is safe, of a high quality and that upholds our patients' rights. All our patients have the right to live lives free from abuse or neglect and, where they are able, to make or be supported to make informed decisions and choices about their treatment, care and support. Where patients are not able to make their own decisions, Wiltshire Health and Care staff are committed to ensuring that treatment, care and support is undertaken in accordance with the person's best interests. In order to fulfil these commitments, Wiltshire Health and Care follow the Safeguarding principles and responsibilities laid out in Sections 42-46 of the Care Act (2014) and are informed by, and apply, the guiding principles and provisions of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).

If you or your carer have any concerns about abuse, neglect or your rights in relation to care provided by Wiltshire Health and Care or any other agency or individual, please raise this directly with any Wiltshire Health and Care staff or contact the Safeguarding Adults Team by telephone on: 0300 4560111.

Regarding children, WHC is responsible for providing services in accordance with Section 11 of the Children's Act (1989) and works under the principles of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018).

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 1237797 and PALS.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net

Patient and Public Involvement

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net or telephone 01249 454386.