

PATIENT INFORMATION

Back Pain

Advice and Information Resource Pack



Introduction

Back pain is very common. Around 8 out of 10 people will experience low back pain at some time in their lives.

There has been a lot of research in recent years which has changed the thinking about the best way to deal with back pain. Many people are able to deal with back pain themselves most of the time. The information in this booklet gives you up-to-date advice to help you to deal with the pain and recover as quickly as possible.

Your Physiotherapist will fully assess your back problem and how it is affecting you. They will then advise you about the best way to deal with the pain dependant on your needs. This may range from advice and exercises to onward referral to specialist services, if required.

The best advice is to keep active, do normal activities as much as possible and return to work as soon as possible

What is causing my back pain?

Your spine is very strong and difficult to damage. It is a flexible column made of chunky bones joined by discs to make it strong and flexible. Strong ligaments reinforce this and it is protected by a strong corset of muscles.

Non-specific back pain – the most common cause.

In most people a cause cannot be found for back pain. Although this is difficult to understand, it is also reassuring to know that you do not have a serious problem in your back. In some cases, it can be caused by an injury or sprain, but most of the time it isn't, and may be due to poor posture, lack of exercise or stiffness.

You may hear your back pain described as “simple” or “non-specific” back pain. This means that following examination, the clinician is not concerned you have a serious medical condition.

This type of back pain responds well to building up your activities and exercise again over a few days or even weeks.

Tension and stress can be responsible for an increase in pain.

If you are physically fit your back pain may be less and you will recover more quickly.

Sciatica

This is less common than back pain (less than 1 in 20 people). It is most often caused by pressure or irritation of nerves as they come out of the lower back.

Symptoms might include pain, numbness or tingling that spread down the leg, sometimes to the calf or foot. Most people recover from sciatica but often it takes longer than non-specific back pain.

The Facts

- It is unlikely your back pain is due to serious disease.
- With normal activity most back pains will settle.
- 50% of people who get back pain will have recurrence within a couple of years, but this does not mean it is serious and most people get back to normal activities between attacks, with minimal, if any symptoms.
- Although back pain can be very painful and you may need to cut down some activities for a time, resting for more than a few days may slow down your recovery so keep ACTIVE.
- Normal activity is the most beneficial exercise for your back.
- Investigations such as x-rays and scans are rarely needed as they don't help the clinicians to diagnose your problem and they don't provide a cure.

How to manage acute episodes of back pain

Back pain usually gets better on its own in a matter of weeks but there are a few things you can do to aid this:

Painkillers

- Take some simple painkillers or anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen
- Contact your Pharmacist or Doctor if you need stronger pain killers
- Heat and/or cold packs can help with symptoms relief.

Sleep

- Taking a painkiller just before bedtime may make it easier to get to sleep. Some people say a small pillow between their knees helps them to sleep.

Activity

- If the pain is really bad - you may need a short period of rest but bed rest should be avoided if possible. It should only be necessary if the pain is so bad that you cannot move around at all, even then for short periods only - 24-48 hours is the maximum recommended time.
- Choose a comfortable position to rest in between activity.
- Try to move around for a few minutes every hour to prevent stiffness.
- Activity has been shown to be the most effective way of improving back pain.

Work

- Resume your normal activity and get back to work, a little pain and some restriction is normal.
- If you have a difficult or heavy job it may be possible to make some simple changes to make it easier-speak to your employer.

Remember - pain does not necessarily mean harm.

Exercise and Activity

NICE recommends self-management and staying physically active amongst other interventions for the management of back pain.

Your physiotherapist will be able to provide you with some specific exercises that will help your recovery. Regular exercises may also help to prevent the back pain from returning.

Increasing activity and exercise can be achieved through a variety of settings and providers. Anything you enjoy from walking the dog, or cycling to work, to swimming, Pilates, Tai Chi or dancing. You can undertake activity in the pleasure of your own home or attend community lead classes provided either by the NHS or privately.

Some local Public Health Services you may wish to contact are;

Your Health Torbay

<https://yourhealthtorbay.co.uk/>

Active Devon

<https://activedevon.org/>

Persistent back pain

If you have pain that lasts for 3 months or more, you may be referred on to our Pain Therapy Service. You can also self-refer. Into the Pain Therapy Service

This team offer 1:1 appointments or a series of educational pain seminars and short courses based on our Reconnect2life website.

These seminars are aimed at people who experience ongoing chronic pain and want to learn a range of ways to improve how they are currently managing their pain condition. These sessions include practical and self-directed learning.

Seminars and short courses include:

Understanding Pain

Coping with the emotional impact of pain

Getting started with exercise

Activity management

Sleep management



www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/pain-service/reconnect2life/

www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/pain-service/useful-resources/

Rare causes

In less than 1 in 100 cases back pain has a more serious cause. These include infection, fracture, tumour or inflammation.

Remember, back pain is rarely due to serious disease or damage even when the pain is severe. But there are occasions when advice should be sought.

When to seek medical advice

- Severe day and night pain that doesn't improve.
- If you have had a fall that caused your back pain to start
- If you have had cancer in the past
- If you are taking steroid tablets or have osteoporosis.
- If you have a fever or are generally unwell

See A&E urgently if:

- 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

Any combination of these seek help immediately.

Useful Resources

Useful Trust resources

www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/physiotherapy/

Useful external resources

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/>
www.csp.org.uk/conditions/back-pain
<http://backcare.org.uk/i-have-back-or-neck-pain/library>

Useful external videos

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOjTegn9RuY
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/lower-back-pain>

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.