

## Back Pain

**Back pain is very common and normally improves within a few weeks or months.** Pain in the lower back is particularly common, although it can be felt anywhere along the spine – from the neck down to the hips.

In most cases the pain isn't caused by anything serious and will usually get better over time. There are things you can do to help relieve it, but sometimes the pain can last a long time or keep coming back.

Often it's not possible to identify the cause of back pain. Doctors call this "non-specific" back pain. Sometimes the pain may be a result of an injury such as a sprain or strain, but often it occurs for no apparent reason. It's very rarely caused by anything serious.

### Managing your condition

You are not alone, low back pain affects 8 out of 10 people in the UK at some time in their life. Below are some tips to help you manage your condition.

- **Keep moving** - Avoid lying in bed and remain active as far as possible, even if you're uncomfortable. This won't harm your back, and you can expect to get better more quickly.
- **Stay positive** - People who manage to stay positive despite their pain tend to recover quicker. Keep going out to do things you enjoy.
- **Sleeping position**- Take the strain off your back by trying different sleeping positions and putting a pillow between your legs or under your knees if you prefer lying on your back.
- **Work** - Try to stay at work or return to work as soon as you can and together with your employer consider options such as a phased return to work, altered hours, amended duties or workplace adaptations.
- **Other treatments** - Physiotherapy, acupuncture or seeing a chiropractor or osteopath can also be helpful (make sure they're registered).

### How can I avoid triggers/ suggested lifestyle changes?

It's difficult to prevent back pain, but the following tips may help reduce your risk:

- **Stay active** – doing regular exercise can help keep your back strong; adults are advised to do 150 minutes of exercise a week
- **Avoid sitting** for too long when driving or at work
- **Take care when lifting** –Lift close to your body, bend your knees instead of your back, and try to avoid lifting heavy items. Read some safe lifting tips
- **Posture** - check your posture when sitting, using computers and watching television. Find out how to sit correctly and tips for laptop users
- **Supportive Mattress** - ensure the mattress on your bed supports you properly
- **Lose weight** - through a combination of a healthy diet and regular exercise if you're overweight – being overweight can increase your risk of developing back pain

### How do I treat?

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

- **Keep Moving** - Stay as active as possible and try to continue your daily activities, this is one of the most important things you can do, as resting for long periods is likely to make the pain worse
- **Try exercises and stretches for back pain** - other activities such as walking, swimming, yoga and pilates may also be helpful
- **Medication** - take anti-inflammatory painkillers, such as ibuprofen; you can also use these as 'Rub-on' (topical) treatments, do not use them together.  
Pain killers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen are effective in most cases, Paracetamol and ibuprofen can be taken together if required. Stronger medicines, such as codeine, are an additional option when simpler ones are not working.

- **Use hot or cold compression packs for short-term relief** - you can buy these from your local pharmacy, or a hot water bottle and a bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in a cloth will work just as well
- **Speak to your pharmacist** - for advice if you're not sure which type of medicine is best for you and your symptoms.

Although it can be difficult, it helps if you stay optimistic and recognise your pain should get better, people who manage to stay positive despite their pain tend to recover quicker.

### When should I see a GP?

Back pain usually gets better on its own within a few weeks or months and you may not need to see a doctor or other healthcare professional.

But it's a good idea to get help if:

- the pain doesn't start to improve within a few weeks
- the pain stops you doing your day-to-day activities
- the pain is very severe or gets worse over time
- you're worried about the pain or are struggling to cope

You can see your GP, who will ask about your symptoms, examine your back, and discuss possible treatments. They may refer you to a specialist doctor or a physiotherapist for further help.

Alternatively, you may want to consider approaching a physiotherapist directly. Some NHS physiotherapists accept appointments without a doctor's referral, or you could choose to pay for private treatment.

### When to get immediate medical advice

You should contact your GP or NHS 111 immediately if you have back pain and:

- numbness or tingling around your genitals or buttocks
- difficulty peeing
- loss of bladder or bowel control
- chest pain
- a high temperature (fever) of 38C (100.4F) or above
- unexplained weight loss
- a swelling or a deformity in your back
- it doesn't improve after resting or is worse at night
- it started after a serious accident, such as after a car accident

### More information is available at the following website

- NHS website - [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- Or visit your local pharmacy for advice

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