

# Adolescent back pain

Information for patients, parents and carers

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## What causes back pain?

Back pain is becoming increasingly common in adolescence and can be caused by rapid growth, prolonged poor posture, reduced activity levels or carrying heavy school bags.

The most common symptoms are:

- Pain in your upper or lower back
- Reduced back range of movement
- Reduced muscle strength and muscle flexibility
- Altered posture.

## What is the treatment?

By following the advice below your back pain should start to improve within 6 weeks.

- It is important that you keep moving. In most cases movement and activity will not damage your back. Try reducing high impact activities or positions that make your pain worse until it settles
- Make sure you do not stay in one position for prolonged periods as this can make your back pain worse. Take regular movement breaks if sitting on a computer or another electronic device— move around every 20 minutes
- You may find that heat will help your back muscles relax. Using either a heat pad or a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel may help. Please ensure this is not too hot or directly touching your skin. Place on the painful area for 10-15 minutes. Please check your skin regularly
- Start gentle back exercises (as detailed in this leaflet) to improve your range of movement and the strength of your back.

A useful resource for further information is: <http://www.ergonomics4kids.co.uk>

## Exercises for your back



Lie on your back with your hands clasped behind your thigh. Gently straighten your knee and hold for at least 30 seconds.

Repeat 2-3 times on each leg.



Lie on your back with your arms out to the side. Bend one knee up and over so it is touching the floor. Keep your legs in this position whilst bringing your hands to touch each other then opening out again.

Repeat 5-10 times on each side.



Sit back on your heels.

Walk your hands forwards as shown to feel a stretch in your upper body and shoulders. Take a deep breath and walk your fingers forward a little way to increase the stretch.

Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat 5 times, daily.



Start on your hands and knees. Round your back up like a cat and hold for 10 seconds.

Return to your starting position so your back is flat (not arched).

Then look forward and hollow your back. Hold for 10 seconds.

Return to your starting position so your back is flat.

Repeat 10 times, daily.



## **Treatment advice**

Use a rucksack for school. Please ensure you use both of the shoulder straps. When packing your bag, place the heaviest item at the back of your bag.

If possible try to avoid carrying a heavy bag, try to use your locker at school if you have one for any heavy items.

## **Returning to activities**

Once your back pain is reducing and the flexibility of your back is improving try to start gradually building up your activity levels to what you would normally do.

Try starting with lower impact activities (such as swimming or cycling) then gradually return to your usual activities ensuring you warm up and cool down properly.

## **Further advice**

If your symptoms are not settling please attend your GP for further assessment or you can contact the physiotherapy department on the details below.



## **Contact telephone number**

### **Physiotherapy Team**

Therapies Department,  
Royal Hospital for Children and Young People,  
50 Little France Crescent  
Edinburgh  
EH16 4SA

Telephone: **0131 312 1079**