

BACK MATTERS

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF HAVE A HEALTHY BACK

This leaflet provides information for adults on self help strategies for low back pain



Low back pain is very common. 8/10 of us will have back pain at some point in our lives. In most cases the pain isn't caused by anything serious. It will usually get better within a few weeks to months.

8 Tips for a Healthy Back

- 1. Keep Active:** Avoid bed rest. Keeping active is important even if you have to move slowly at first and gradually build it up.
- 2. Stay at work/hobbies:** Or return to them as soon as possible. People who continue to work during an episode of back pain recover more quickly.
- 3. Pain Management:** Your pharmacist can advise you on medication
- 4. Reduce or quit smoking:** Smokers have slower recovery rates and are at higher risk of sciatica coming back than non-smokers
- 5. Maintain a healthy weight:** Being overweight increases your risk of developing low back pain.
- 6. A good night's sleep:** Improving sleep routine and habits can be very helpful in reducing pain.
- 7. Stay positive:** Back pain nearly always gets better. Having a positive mood and keeping up your normal daily activities, despite your pain, can help your recovery.
- 8. Don't rush for tests:** MRI and x-ray's are rarely helpful. Tests can be arranged by your healthcare professional if necessary.

For further information please refer to:
www.nhsinform.scot

What causes back pain?

Often it's not possible to identify a specific cause of back pain. It is rarely caused by anything serious. Sometimes the pain can be the result of an injury such as a sprain or strain. However, it can occur for no clear reason and this is often the most common type.

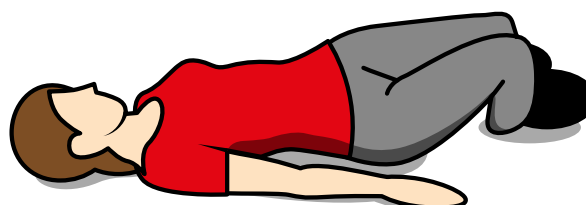
Occasionally back pain can be due to an irritation of a nerve that runs into your legs ("sciatica"). These conditions can cause other symptoms such as a numb feeling, weakness or tingling sensation.

Activity and Exercises

Exercise is helpful for back pain. The best type is doing what you enjoy. Walking, running, cycling, swimming, stretching, yoga and pilates all have similar effects for back pain. Gradually build up over several days or weeks.

In the early phase of back pain, the simple exercises below may be helpful:

Rolling your knees: You should do this exercise while lying down. Rolling your knees from left to right is one repetition.

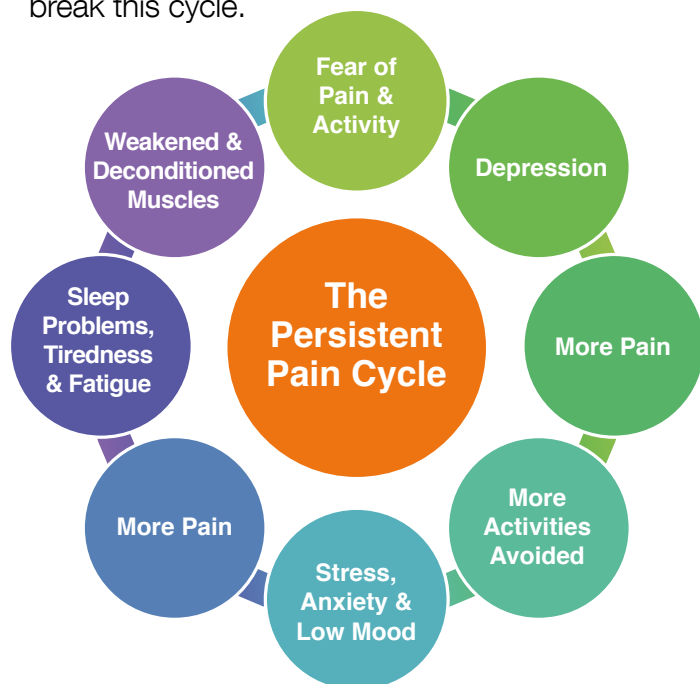


Tilting your pelvis: You should do this exercise while lying down. Pressing and releasing your back is one repetition.



Why does some Low Back Pain not get Better?

Sometimes low back pain can last a long time or keep coming back. This does not mean your back pain is being caused by anything serious. The diagram below explains why this can happen. It is important to recover your confidence in your back and start to move again to help break this cycle.



When to Speak to a Health Professional

If you experience any of the following, phone NHS 24 on 111 as soon as possible:

- Difficulty passing or controlling urine
- Numbness or altered feeling around your back passage or genitals – such as wiping after toileting
- Pins and needles around your back passage or genitals – such as wiping after toileting

If you experience any of the following, speak to your GP as soon as possible:

- Generally feeling unwell
- Back pain that starts when you're ill with other problems – such as rheumatoid arthritis or cancer
- Unsteadiness when you walk



What to do if your back pain is not improving:

The Musculoskeletal (MSK) Helpline can provide you with further information and if required refer you to a healthcare professional.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/nhs-services/helplines/musculoskeletal-msk-helpline>

Tel: 0800 917 9390

NHS Lothian integrated spinal service

In NHS Lothian all the services which help people with low back pain and back related leg pain work together. This ensures they provide the right service, for the right person, at the right time, in the right place.

Some people will be referred to physiotherapy which can be done by the MSK helpline (see above) or your GP.

A physiotherapist will assess you and discuss your options with you. If necessary you may be assessed by one of our advanced practitioners.

Please see NHS Lothian integrated spinal service information video for more information: <https://services.nhslothian.scot/IBPS/Pages/default.aspx>

Useful Web Addresses:

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy advice on managing back pain: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24P7cTQjsVM>

NHS Inform: www.nhsinform.scot

NHS Lothian Physiotherapy: <https://services.nhslothian.scot/Physiotherapy/Pages/default.aspx>

The content of this leaflet is provided for general information only.

Sources: NHS Inform & Chartered Society of Physiotherapy