

## What to do when back pain strikes

Back pain is a common condition in the UK and it is the largest cause of work related absence.

It is uncomfortable but not usually serious.



### **You should stay active**

Bed rest and immobility prolong back pain. Staying gently active will help your back to recover sooner. You should expect some things you do will be painful. However, hurt does not equal harm, so even if it is painful you will not be harming your back.

### **Be aware of things that make the pain worse**

Try to avoid activities that are going to increase the strain on your back. For example, long periods of sitting / driving and heavy lifting or twisting activities. Keep active but avoid excessive lifting and long periods in the same position.

## **Practice good posture**

When you are sitting, sit upright with a small cushion or a rolled up towel in the small of your back. If you are driving make sure your low back is properly supported and you can use your wing mirrors without having to twist round. Take some regular breaks if driving long distances and try some stretches.

## **Take painkillers regularly**

This allows you to stay active, prevents muscle spasm and stops you adopting odd postures in an attempt to avoid pain. Speak to your pharmacist or GP about which painkillers may be best for you and take them regularly as prescribed.

## **Stay at work**

Try and stay at work as normal. It encourages gentle activity and prevents back pain having a negative impact on your life. Discuss your work options with your employer, they may be able to help you stay in work, or possibly modify your duties, while you have back pain.

## **Exercise**

Exercise is an excellent way of settling back pain and preventing back pain. There is no strong evidence to suggest any particular exercise is better than another. Do them little and often and as the pain subsides, build up the exercises. Activities like walking and swimming are low impact and great for strengthening your spine. Activities like yoga and pilates can help improve flexibility and the strength of your back. Ask your physiotherapist for further details.

## **Hot / cold**

See the information sheet on “hot versus cold therapy” for further information on using the above as treatment.

## **Physiotherapy**

Physiotherapists have a history of successfully treating people, of all ages and abilities, with back pain. They will undertake an initial assessment with you – which involves asking questions about your symptoms and examining your back and other relevant areas. You will then discuss the range of treatment options based on their findings. Examples of potential treatments include – manual therapy (soft tissue techniques and mobilisation of your spine), acupuncture, TENS, taping, exercise and advice.

You should see your GP as soon as possible if you have any of the following along with your back pain:

- A high temperature (fever)
- Redness or swelling on your back
- Pain down your legs and below your knees
- Numbness or weakness in one or both legs or around your buttocks.
- Incontinence (loss of bladder or bowel control)
- Constant pain, particularly at night
- Pain that is getting much worse and is spreading up your spine

These symptoms MAY indicate a more serious, underlying cause of your back pain which is why it is important to seek medical help.



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