Physiotherapy Department

Back Advice Leaflet

Introduction

The Back Advice Leaflet has been written for people with back pain and explains the causes of back problems and how to deal with the pain.

Back pain is very common. 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.

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.

- Most people with backache do not have actual damage to their spine.
- A 'slipped' disc or trapped nerve is uncommon and even then will usually recover without treatment.
- An x-ray may show normal changes related to ageing - this is not arthritis.
- 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.
- Most pain comes from the muscles, ligaments and joints in your back - you need to get your back moving properly again to relieve this.
- 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.

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.

Should I rest or should I exercise?

Rest is bad for backs because:

- Pain may not change and may even worsen.
- Your general fitness will decrease.
- Muscle power will reduce.
- Bone density may lessen.
- You may feel stiffer.
- Low moods may result.
- The longer you rest the harder it is to get going again.

compassionate care

General exercise will help to overcome the pain without stressing your back.
Try swimming or walking.

Physical fitness is important to reduce pain and increase your stamina.

To improve your fitness you need to “train” over a period of time.

Gradually increasing the amount of time you spend and the number of exercises that you do.
Stretch gradually and build up slowly.

Some discomfort or increase in pain is normal and should not stop you from exercising or trying to keep active.

What to do in an acute attack

- Back pain usually gets better on its own.
  Activity has been shown to be the most effective way of improving back pain.
- Take some simple painkillers or anti-inflammatories.
- If the pain is really bad - you may need a short period of reduced activity.

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

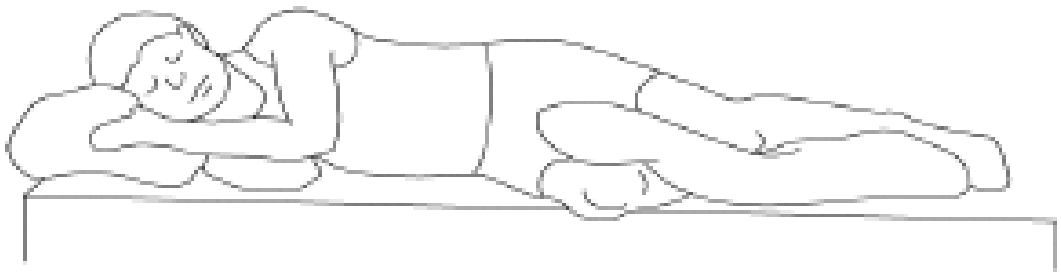
24-48 hours is the maximum recommended time.

- contact your Doctor - you may need stronger pain killers

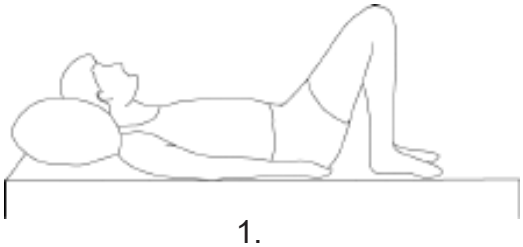
- choose a comfortable position

- try to move around for a few minutes every hour to prevent stiffness.

This position may be a suitable one to try for comfort



To get out of bed:



1.
Bend up your knees



2.
Turn on your side



3.
Drop your feet over ... as you the edge of the bed



4.
Push up with your arms

- You should build up your activities and exercise again over a few days or even weeks.
- Resume your normal activity and get back to work, a little pain and some restriction is normal. **Remember - pain does not necessarily mean harm.**
- If you have a difficult or heavy job it may be possible to make some simple changes to make it easier - talk to your boss.

What can I do to help myself

Most treatments can help to ease pain. They are not a cure but should help to keep you active and working.

Pain killers / Anti-inflammatories

It is important to take tablets regularly and not wait until your pain is out of control, otherwise they will not be as effective.
If you have indigestion, an ulcer problem or asthma - ask your doctor or pharmacist about the use of anti-inflammatories and aspirin.

Muscle tension and stress

Stress and muscle tension are linked together. Stress can increase tension and tightness in muscles and therefore increase backache. You could try to reduce its effects by learning breathing exercises and muscle relaxation techniques.

Heat or Cold

The use of heat can help with pain and muscle relaxation. Use a warm water bottle, or microwavable wheat bag, following the instructions provided when you purchased it. To protect your skin from heat burns, wrap the item in a few layers of towel. Leave in place for 15-20 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish.

The use of ice can help with pain and inflammation. Use crushed ice cubes or a bag of frozen peas. Protect the skin from an ice burn by placing the ice pack in a wet towel. Leave in place for 15-20 minutes. It can be reapplied after 2 hours if you wish.

It's normal for the skin to become pink with either heat or ice, however if you experience discomfort or a burning sensation remove the item immediately. Don't apply heat or ice packs if you have poor skin sensation or poor circulation, if you are diabetic or over areas of infection.

Daily Activity

Most daily activities are possible if you plan them. Have a break - change your position regularly - don't continue with one activity for longer than 15-20 minutes - increase your activities gradually to return to full fitness.

You may have good and bad days - this is normal.

Try to keep your activity levels consistent day to day rather than being overactive on your good days and underactive on your bad days.

Helpful suggestions

Activity: Try to exercise 3 times a week for 20-30 minutes. Gradually increase your activities.

Sitting: Sit on a straight chair/dining chair with support in your lower back e.g. a rolled up towel. Sit for no longer than about 20 minutes at a time, then have a walk around.

Standing: Don't stand for longer than 20 minutes.

Sleeping: A good supportive base with a comfortable mattress is important. Not too hard or soft.

Driving: Sit upright supporting your lower back if necessary with a rolled up towel. Sit close enough to the steering wheel and pedals to reduce strain on your back.

Lifting: Think and plan before you lift. Lift using your legs. Keeping your back straight. Move your feet when turning - don't twist your back. Don't lift if you don't have to.

Posture: Balance is the Key.



The key to having a healthy back is maintaining balance in the four curves that help absorb shock and provide for flexibility.

The natural curves in your back allow weight to be shared by various structures in the spine.

Poor posture causes unnecessary loading on the spine and may lead to more pain. Avoid poor posture by sitting well supported, for example with a cushion or a rolled up towel in the small of your back, with your feet resting flat on the floor.

When standing, stand tall with your shoulders slightly widened. Maintain a gentle hollow your lower back. Avoid any one position for more than 20 or 30 minutes.

Exercises

Research shows that muscles weaken quickly with back problems. Exercise is essential to improve muscle strength and prevent recurrent problems.

Stiffness is one of the biggest factors in mechanical back pain. This can be reduced regular movement and change of position. These exercises help to reduce stiffness and also help strengthen the muscles that support your spine. They are designed to be integrated into your normal day.

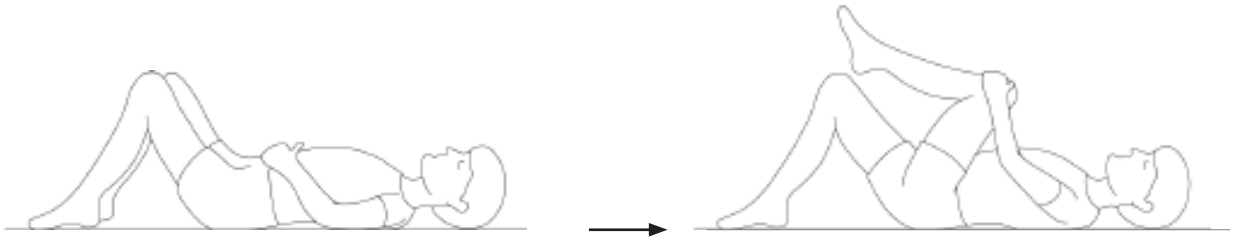
- don't worry if your muscles ache after exercise - this is normal.
- be realistic - gradually increase the number of times you repeat each exercise.
- repeat at intervals during the day.

These exercises should be done 2 or 3 times a day.



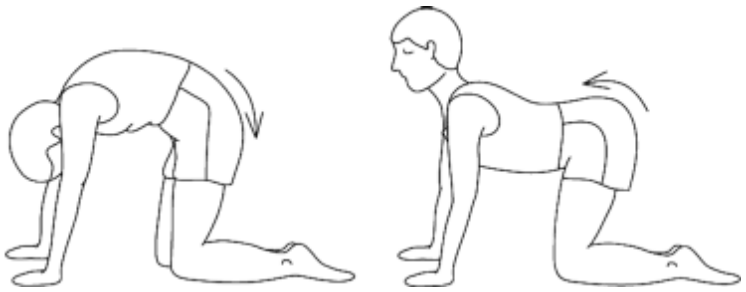
Lying on your back with your knees together and bent.

Action: Tighten your stomach muscles in and gently roll your knees from side to side keeping your upper trunk still.
Repeat 10 times



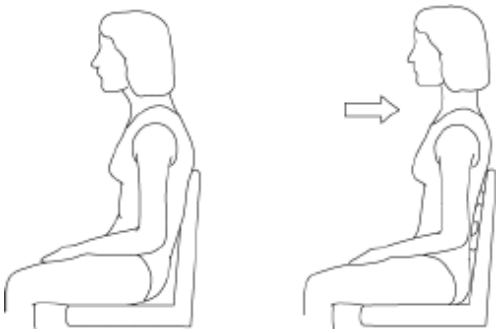
Lying on your back with both knees bent

Action: Bend the leg to be stretched towards your chest and hold onto the knee with both arms.
Pull your knee towards your chin keeping your head on the floor.
You should feel the stretching on the back of your thighs and buttock.
Hold approx. 5 seconds - relax.
Repeat 10 times



Start Position: On hands as knees as shown.

Action: Gently tighten abdominal muscles and tuck tailbone under to arch back upwards as shown.
Then let low back sag towards the floor as you rotate tailbone upward.
Repeat 10 times.

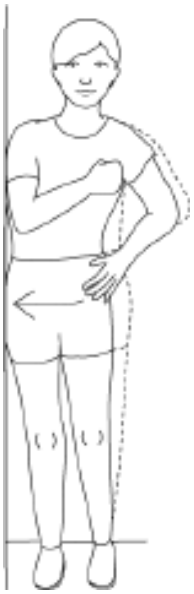


Sit on a straight backed chair

Action: First let your back drop and get slightly rounded, then use your back muscles to straighten your back and arch it (not too much).
Hold approx. 5 secs.
Repeat 10 times.

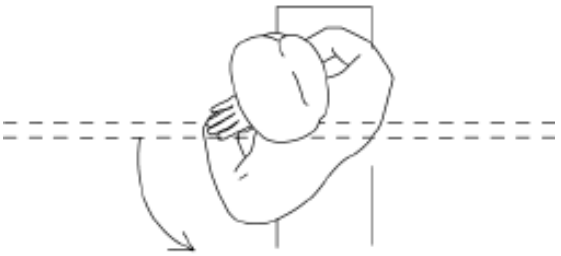
Stand sideways with hip against the wall

Action: Lean hip into wall as shown.
Hold 2 seconds.
Repeat 10 times each hip.



Sit on a chair with good posture - arms folded as shown

Action: Rotate trunk to the right until you feel a stretch.
Repeat to the left.
Repeat 10 times.





Relaxation

Here is one relaxation method:

- lie in a comfortable position in a quiet room
- close your eyes
- start with your right foot - as you breathe out, let your right foot relax and feel heavy
- then think about your right calf - as you breathe out let it relax and feel heavy
- let the feeling of relaxation move into each part of your body - moving step by step to right thigh, left foot and calf, tummy, chest, shoulders, arms etc - remember to include your jaw and neck – these are key areas
- enjoy being relaxed. Concentrate on relaxing as you breathe out

Relaxation is difficult to learn on your own - you may find more details of relaxation at your doctors surgery or at the library.

Doing simple deep breathing exercises may help.
These are useful, as you can do them wherever you are.

When to seek medical advice

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. See your doctor urgently if:

- you have numbness, pins and needles or weakness in both legs;
- you have an unexpected change in your bladder or bowel habits;
- you are unsteady on your feet;
- you have numbness around your genitals or back passage.

You should also see your doctor if you have severe pain which gets worse over several weeks, are having great difficulty sleeping because of your back pain, or if you are generally unwell with your back pain.

Important Facts

- Although common, back pain is rarely serious.
- Pain does not necessarily mean damage.
- Remember hurt does not mean harm.
- Most back pain gets better without treatment.
- Prolonged bed rest is harmful.
- Keep active. Maintain function and prevent recurrence.
- The sooner you start moving the sooner you will feel better.
- Your general health and back is improved with regular exercise and keeping fit.

http://www.cht.nhs.uk/services/clinical-services/physiotherapy-outpatients/patient-careinformation/

QR Code

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

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Telephone: 01484 342434

Booking Office: 01484 728941

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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