

## Low Back Pain Advice and Exercises

### What causes low back pain?

Most back pain is not due to a serious condition.

It can be caused by; bending and lifting incorrectly, prolonged posture and changes in activity. Stress and anxiety can also cause or worsen back pain.

### What are the symptoms?

- Pain
- Reduced movement
- Stiffness
- Muscle Spasm

### How long will it take to recover?

Most low back pain gets better by itself, but there is good evidence that gentle activity speeds up recovery and prevents the pain from becoming persistent.

The pain usually starts to settle within a few days.

Your back likes movement so it is good to return to normal activities as soon as you are able to.

The majority of simple strains do not cause lasting problems, as the body is very good at healing itself.

### What treatment can I use?

#### Painkillers

If your GP or pharmacist has prescribed pain killers, then these should be taken at the recommended dose.

#### Hot or Cold Packs

Gentle heat (hot water bottle) can help reduce muscle spasm and pain. A cold pack (ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can also provide short-term relief. Use whichever pack you find most helpful. Apply to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every few hours.

#### Relaxation

Learning to relax your muscles can be useful if your back pain is worsened by stress.

#### Massage

Gentle soft tissue massage around the lower back may help relaxation and reduce pain.

## Early Movement and Exercise

Simple exercises can be performed to help restore the movement in your back, preventing stiffness. Getting stiff muscles and joints moving is often uncomfortable to start with but becomes much easier as you regain flexibility.

### General Advice

Don't have prolonged bed rest, your back will get stiff and muscles will get weak, you may lose fitness and feel worse in the long run.

Don't rely on painkillers alone, use gentle heat, relaxation and exercise to reduce pain.

Do not rest for long periods at a time as this will lead to stiffness and weakness and prolong your recovery.

Keep active; maintain your normal daily activities, pacing them throughout the day as much as possible to avoid further flare ups.

Keep your body healthy in the long run, with exercise.

## How can I improve my posture?

Poor posture can often play a part in back pain and stiffness.

Ensure you take regular breaks from prolonged sitting or standing. Try not to stay in one position for more than 20-30 minutes.

You can use a rolled up towel in the arch of your lower back whilst sitting, to help support it (see illustration).

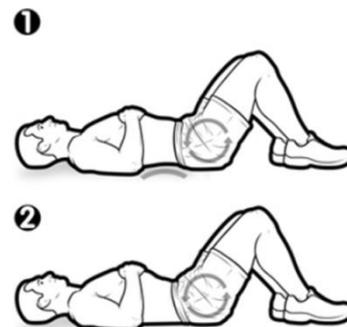
Ensuring your office/home work space is set-up correctly can help reduce your back pain.



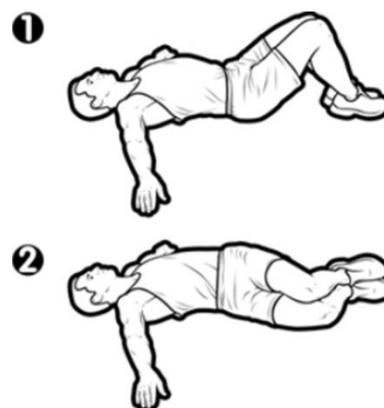
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## Exercises for your back

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the floor and your pelvis and lumbar spine in 'neutral' (1). Tilt your pelvis backwards by flattening your spine and sliding your tailbone towards your feet (2). Hold this contraction while breathing normally for 3 breaths then slowly return to 'neutral' (1). Relax and repeat.



2. Lie on your back with your knees bent; feet on the floor and arms outstretched (1). While keeping your shoulders flat on the floor, slowly roll your knees to one side as far as you can, rotating your lower back (2). Slowly return to the start position (1) and rotate to the opposite side. Repeat.



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