

Understanding and Managing Low Back Pain



Source: painHealth

Low back pain is a common condition that affects people at least once in their lifetime. It can be very unpleasant and affect one's quality of life.

About 90% of people with back pain do not have a specific cause. Most people with back pain get better in 6 weeks. If your pain remains, do speak to your doctor or physiotherapist.

About 5-10% of people have leg pain due to the irritation of the spinal nerves. Less than 1% have a serious spinal condition that would require immediate medical attention. Your doctor or physiotherapist will ask you questions and perform a physical examination to find out more.

What should I watch out for?

Serious causes of back pain are very rare. Seek immediate medical attention if you have any of the following signs and symptoms that come with the pain:

- Recent fall
- Severe pain that is unaffected by position or activity
- Recent changes in your bladder or bowel frequency and/or flow
- Numbness in the private areas
- Weakness in your legs
- Unsteady walking
- Unintentional loss of weight and appetite

Risk factors for back pain:

- Smoking
- Obesity
- Low levels of physical activity

The following factors can also contribute to back pain as they make muscles more tense and our bodies more sensitive to pain.



Our thoughts
Worrying, thinking negatively



Our emotions
Anxiety, low mood, stress



Things we do
Insufficient sleep, inactivity

Source: Flaticon

Tips to manage back pain

Stay active	Maintain a healthy lifestyle	Physiotherapy	Pain relief
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move in a relaxed manner by breathing in and out. This reduces muscle tension in your back • Start with simple activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have sufficient sleep and a well-balanced diet • Reduce smoking • Exercise regularly • Speak to someone about your stresses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercises and advice targeted at your condition. • Manual techniques may be used to help you move better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take pain medications when needed • Hot pack for 20 min, 2-3 times a day

Recurrence of back pain

It is common to experience another episode of back pain. Discuss with your physiotherapist if there are possible causes and learn how to manage them.

Exercises

You may experience slight pain as you begin to exercise. It is important that you do the exercises in a relaxed manner by breathing in and out normally. You may perform these exercises 3 times a day. Please consult your doctor or physiotherapist if you feel more pain when doing the exercises.




The guide below can help to make sure you are exercising at the right level²:



0-3 out of 10: Continue with exercise.

4-5 out of 10: Reduce the repetitions, duration, and intensity.

6 or above: Stop exercise. Consider another exercise instead.

<p style="text-align: center;">Knee hugs</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lie with your knees bent and your feet on the bed. • Lift one knee towards your chest. • Place your hands behind the knee and draw it towards your chest. • You should feel a gentle stretch at your lower back or buttock. • Hold for 5 to 10 seconds. • Repeat 10 times or as tolerated.
<p style="text-align: center;">Knee roll</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lie on your back with knees together and bent. • Slowly roll your knees from side to side, without moving the upper trunk. • You should feel a stretch at your lower back. • Hold for 5 to 10 seconds. • Repeat 10 times or as tolerated.
<p style="text-align: center;">Bridging</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lie on your back with knees bent on the bed. • Lift your buttocks up from the bed by gently pushing through your feet. • Lower your buttocks back down on the bed. • Repeat 10 times or as tolerated.

Please note that the instructions illustrated in this handout is strictly for information purpose. If you have any queries, kindly proceed to check with your doctor or physiotherapist.

Frequently asked questions

“Do I need a scan?”

Scans are recommended if (1) serious conditions are suspected, (2) conservative management has not been helpful, or symptoms are worsening (3) scans are likely to change care management.

“I had a scan and was told that my back pain is due to degeneration, is that true?”

Spine degeneration is present in many people, even those without pain³. These changes are part of ageing and should not be the cause of your pain. Lifestyle factors such as physical inactivity, smoking, obesity, poor sleep, depression and anxiety are more likely to contribute to pain and recovery.

“How does exercise help?”

Exercise has several benefits. It helps your muscles and joints move better. Exercise can help to improve blood sugar levels, which in turn decreases inflammation and pain in the body. People who exercise regularly have also reported better mood and sleep.

“What exercises should I do?”

There is no one specific exercise and doing exercises that you enjoy will be most helpful. Start slow if you have not exercised for a while. Aquatic exercises, stretching, aerobic, strength training, endurance, yoga, and tai chi are recommended.

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