

Back pain

This leaflet offers more information about back pain. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is back pain and why have I got it?

Back pain is very common and is not usually caused by any serious disease.

Most low back pain will settle on its own without treatment within about six weeks.

Sometimes back pain can last longer than this but this does not mean it is serious.

Things that can contribute to back pain may include activity, anxiety and stress levels and your previous experience of pain.

It is important to remember that there are lots of things you can do to help manage your symptoms.

When should I contact a medical professional?

If your pain is severe and gets worse not better over several weeks or if your back pain makes you feel unwell, you should see your GP.

You should also see your GP, straight away, if you have:

- difficulty passing or controlling urine
- numbness around your genitals or back passage
- numbness, pins and needles, or weakness in both legs
- unsteadiness on your feet
- back pain after a severe blow or fall.

What treatments are available?

You should use something to control the pain – this may include using over-the-counter pain relief and heat or ice.

Is there anything I can do to help myself?

Activity

What you can do depends on how your back feels - most people find it useful to modify their activities for a time but also to make sure they stay active and live life as normal.

Your back is designed for movement – and needs movement. You may be limited in how much you can do when your pain is bad but the sooner you get moving and restart your usual daily activities the sooner you will feel better.

Doctors and physiotherapists can help ease the pain but only you can get your back moving.

Try to strike a balance between staying active and not putting too much strain on your back. These basic rules should help you:

- do not stay in one position for too long
- move about before you stiffen up
- move a little further each day
- don't stop doing things - but change the way you do them
- think before you lift and don't lift more than you need to. Keep the load close to your body and don't twist while you are lifting - turn with your feet instead.

Regular physical activity helps to:

- develop your muscles
- keep you supple
- give you stronger bones
- make you fit
- make you feel good
- release natural chemicals that reduce pain.

Even when you have back pain you can start to move without putting too much stress on it by:

- walking
- swimming
- using an exercise bike
- doing most daily activities and hobbies.

Getting stiff joints and muscles working can be painful, but that does not mean damage is being done, it is normal at first to feel a little sore and as you become fitter the pain should ease off.

A chartered physiotherapist or your GP will be able to advise you on some gentle exercises or stretches.

Bed rest

Bed rest is not helpful for backs – in the long term it can cause:

- stiffness
- muscles and bones to weaken
- low mood
- increased back pain
- decreased physical fitness.

Anxiety, stress and muscle tension

Anxiety and stress can increase the amount of pain you feel and tension can cause muscle spasm.

If stress is a problem you need to recognise it and try to do something about it so it doesn't aggravate or prolong your pain.

You can reduce the effects of stress with controlled breathing, muscle relaxation and mental calming techniques.

Useful sources of information

<http://www.csp.org.uk/publications/exercise-advice-leaflets>

<https://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/Arthritis-information/Daily-Life/Pain-and-arthritis/Common-aches-and-pains.aspx>

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your back pain, please contact your physiotherapist on 020 8487 6022 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm). Alternatively contact us by email:

WACCG.physiotherapyoutpatients@nhs.net

We are also on Twitter: @QMHMSKphysio

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111



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