

Back Pain in Children

This leaflet provides information about back pain in children. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your child's care.

Why does my child have back pain?

Back pain is common at all ages, including in children where it is more common to be experienced in adolescence. There are many causes of back pain in children and the most common causes will improve by themselves. Back pain in children is more common in females, children with poor posture and children who are overweight.

Causes of back pain in children include:

- Poor posture
- Carrying schoolbags which are too heavy (particularly on one shoulder only)
- Having an inactive lifestyle with lots of sitting down
- Injuries
- Playing too much competitive sport
- Some medical conditions such as Juvenile Arthritis, an infection or Ankylosing Spondylitis.

What can I do to help my child's back pain?

There are several ways to help with back pain that can be tried at home.

Pain killers – Paracetamol and Ibuprofen can be bought over the counter and can often help with back pain. The aim is to get the pain to a level at which your child can function in a normal manner (i.e., go to school and be able to pay attention without being distracted by pain, take part in simple activities such as walking).

Staying active – keeping moving is important as it helps to reduce pain and helps to prevent stiffness from developing. Whilst staying active is important, your child shouldn't be doing activities that make the pain worse and they should avoid high impact sports like rugby or football.

Stretches for back pain – certain stretches and movements can be helpful for back pain. Most children do not need to see a physiotherapist for this - the NHS website has a video explaining some of these movements which can be

performed without needing to see a physiotherapist first. These movements should start off being performed gently and should not cause pain.

[Back pain - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

Heat and cold – some people find that heat eases their pain, some people find that cold is better. Whichever of these your child finds better, it is important to protect their skin by wrapping the pack in a piece of cloth to prevent burning or cold burn. Hot and cold packs can be bought at most pharmacies and placed on the area causing discomfort. An alternative would be a hot water bottle or hot bath (make sure you check the temperature before they get in) or a pack of frozen vegetables.

Are there any other treatments?

Depending on the cause of the pain and for how long it lasts, seeing a physiotherapist may be helpful. You could contact your GP to discuss whether referral to a physiotherapist would be helpful for your child.

Some of the medical causes for back pain require seeing a specialist to determine whether any other treatments would be beneficial for your child. Most children do not need to see a specialist and your doctor will consider whether your child needs to see them.

What should we look out for?

Although most back pain will improve with things you can do at home, there are a few circumstances when you should take your child to see a doctor. These include:

- Severe back pain which doesn't improve with painkillers at home
- If your child also has a fever
- If your child has lost weight unintentionally
- If the pain is getting worse rather than better
- Back pain which has lasted more than two weeks
- Pain which wakes your child at night
- If your child can't control passing urine or passing a bowel movement
- If they have numbness or pain spreading into their legs
- If they have stiffness in their back
- If any other joints are painful or swollen
- If they can't walk normally or are unable to attend school.

Are any tests needed?

It is rare for blood tests or scans to be needed for back pain in childhood, however there are some circumstances where your doctor might arrange these.

If your child has any of the symptoms mentioned in the ‘What should we look out for’ section, your doctor will consider arranging further tests.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Emergency Department on 020 8725 2666 and ask to be put through to the Paediatric Emergency Department.

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 wings (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

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching ‘St George’s Hospital’ on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.

