

Emergency Department

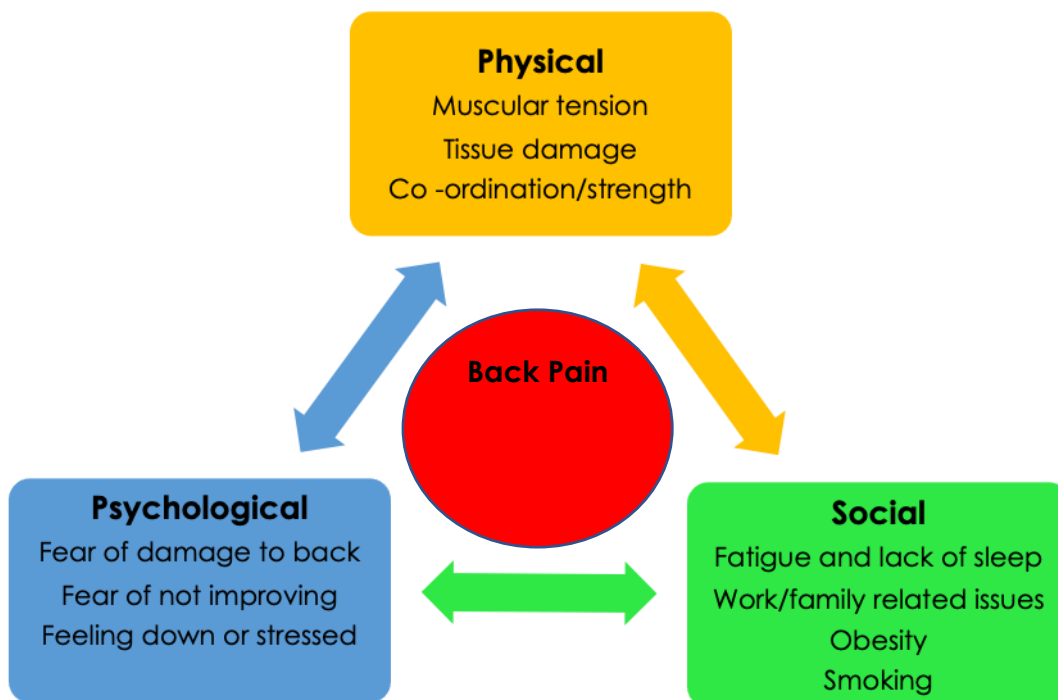
Back Pain Advice

This leaflet provides 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?

Low back pain is extremely common and more than 80% of people will experience it at some point in their life. It is not usually caused by a serious problem and in most cases, it may just be a simple strain to a muscle or ligament.

Many physical, psychological and social factors can cause back pain and often a combination of these is involved.



Types of back pain

- Non-specific low back pain
- Sciatica (nerve root pain)
- More serious spinal problems (Red Flags).

Non-specific low back pain

This is the most common type of back pain, accounting for 90% of presentations.

It is not always possible to diagnose the exact cause of pain in most people which is why the term non-specific low back pain is used.

Sciatica (nerve root pain)

Less than 10% of people will present with sciatica. Sciatica most commonly occurs when a herniated disc, bone spur on the spine or narrowing of the spine (spinal stenosis) compresses part of the nerve. This causes inflammation, pain and often some numbness in the affected leg.

Serious spinal pathology (RED Flags)

Less than one per cent present with a serious cause for their back pain. They present with symptoms, known as 'Red Flags', which require urgent medical attention. If you have some of these signs or symptoms it is important that you alert your GP or another medical professional immediately:

- Difficulty passing urine or having sensation to pass urine that is not there
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Numbness/tingling around genitals or buttocks area
- Impaired sexual function, loss of erections or sensation
- Loss of power in both legs
- A fever or feeling unwell
- History of trauma to back.

Treatment for back pain

Most back pain can be successfully managed with a combination of short- and long-term treatments. An important message is 'hurt does not equal harm' and as far as possible try to maintain your normal everyday activities. See the advice below.

- Keep as active as the pain allows.
- Initially, simple painkillers such as ibuprofen should be taken regularly to get the best benefit. Paracetamol on its own is not effective for back pain relief.
- Seek advice from a healthcare professional, such as a physiotherapist, pharmacist or GP.
- Exercise may form an important part of your recovery. Exercise can also reduce stress and tension, improve mood and sleep quality.

A physiotherapist can advise you on an exercise programme and how to manage the pain. Alternative manual ('hands-on') therapies are available.

Do I need an x-ray or MRI scan?

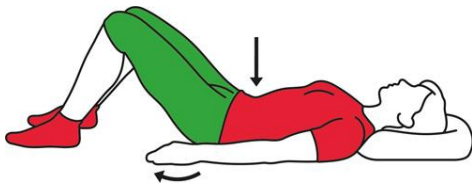
- We do not routinely offer an x-ray of the lumbar spine for the management of uncomplicated back pain. This is because back pain is mainly caused by a soft tissue injury of ligaments or muscles, which are not seen on x-ray.
- MRI scans will only be requested after a clinical assessment and examination finds it necessary (including the presence of RED Flags).

Living with back pain

Most people will recover from an episode of low back pain in six to eight weeks. However, some people experience recurring episodes and for some it can be a long-lasting condition.

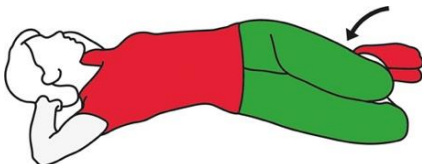
- Stress, anxiety, and low mood can exacerbate existing back pain. Simple relaxation techniques are an effective way of managing pain.
- It is important to aim for 7-8 hours sleep at night as evidence suggests it reduces stress and improves your overall feeling of well-being.
- Staying at work and / or returning to work quickly has been shown to positively influence recovery.

Exercises for back pain



Pelvic Tilt

Lie down with your knees bent. Tighten your stomach muscles, flattening your back against the floor. Hold for five seconds. Repeat five times.



Knee Rolls

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet together. Roll your knees to one side, keeping your shoulders flat on the bed or floor and hold for 10 seconds. Roll your knees back to the starting position and then over to the other side and repeat. Do this exercise three times on each side.





Knees to Chest

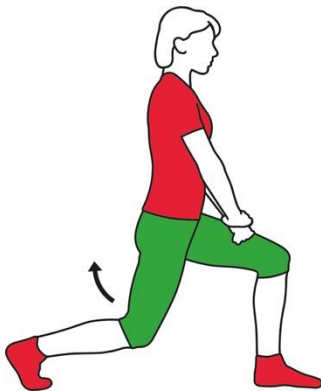
Lie on your back, with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor or bed. Bring one knee up and use your hands to pull it gently towards your chest. Hold the leg in position for five seconds and then relax. Repeat this exercise with the other knee. Do the exercise five times on each side.



Back Stabiliser

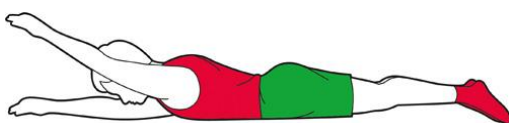
Kneel on all fours with your back straight. Tighten your stomach. Keeping your back in this position, raise one arm in front of you and hold for 10 seconds. Try to keep your pelvis level and don't rotate your body. Repeat 10 times each side.

To progress, try lifting one leg behind you instead of raising your arm.



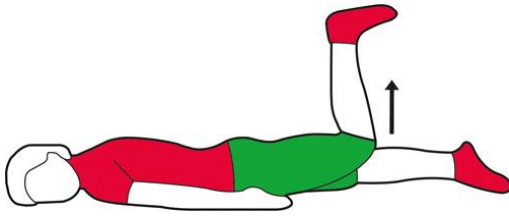
Deep Lunge

Kneel on one knee, the other foot in front. Lift your back knee up, making sure you keep looking forwards. Push your hips forward. Hold for five seconds and repeat three times each side. Try to keep your upper body upright, avoid bending or leaning your upper body forwards.



Arm Raise

Lie on your stomach with your back in a neutral position. Tense the muscles in your lower stomach and raise one arm upwards. Hold this position for five seconds and then relax your arm. Repeat this exercise 10 times with each arm.



Buttock Tone

Lie on your front and bend one leg up behind you. Lift your bent knee just off the floor. Hold for up to eight seconds. Repeat five times each side.

Useful sources of information

1. [Back pain | The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy \(csp.org.uk\)](http://csp.org.uk)
2. [Back pain - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)
3. [Lower Back Pain: Types, Causes, and Treatment | Patient](#)
4. [Versus Arthritis | A future free from arthritis](#)

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 advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

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.



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