

Physiotherapy advice and exercises for low back pain

Introduction

The information and exercises in this leaflet will help you to manage your lower back pain.

What is low back pain?

Low back pain is a common condition and affects one third of the population each year. In a certain number of these cases the effects of back pain can last longer than normal healing times would suggest. It may be that you had a specific injury to your back i.e. lifted or twisted, or your back pain may have started gradually. In these cases Physiotherapy can be particularly useful as a treatment.

What can I do to manage my low back pain?

The exercises listed below can be used to assist in the movement and management of low back pain. Different exercises suit different people, so find the exercises that suit your back condition best and complete these regularly. The exercises below have been designed specifically for movement of your back but also try walking instead of driving or getting off the bus one stop early to walk home. Swimming and cycling are good rhythmic activities to keep you active.

It is important to follow the information in this leaflet carefully. If completing the exercises causes your pain to increase, seek advice from your GP or Physiotherapist.

It is important that your pain is managed while completing these exercises. Remember that experiencing pain does not mean that you are causing damage to your body. If you have high levels of pain speak to your GP or Pharmacist.

Here are some other things to consider throughout the day:

Posture

Do not remain in one position for long periods of time. It is important that you get up from sitting every 20-30 minutes. While sitting, maintain a good posture and use a back support or lumbar roll. It may be that any activity can cause discomfort. Do not worry and with regular changes of activity this will improve.

While sitting do not slouch and a firm chair may be more comfortable than a soft sofa. Try to ensure your hips and knees are bent to 90 degrees and your spine is well supported.

Rest

Resting throughout the day for short periods is fine but do not rest for more than 20-30 minutes. Each time you do rest try not to assume the same position. Regular activity and exercise will be far better than staying in bed for a day. Prolonged rest causes your bones and muscles to get weaker; lose physical fitness, get stiffer and the pain feels worse. It's then often harder to get going again.

You may find more benefit from alternating between cold and hot compresses rather than resting in a static position. If you do use heat, such as a hot water bottle or ice, such as a packet of frozen vegetables, keep them covered in a towel and use for no more than 10-15 minutes. Leave a gap of two hours between using heat / ice to prevent deep tissue irritation.

Sleep

Sleep is an important part of the recovery process. Whilst sleeping, ensure that you have enough pillows - your neck should be in a neutral position, not bent to the side, twisted or flexed / extended. The firmness of the mattress is a personal preference so there is no general guide but a mattress more than 10 years old may be in need of replacement.

Getting out of bed

Roll onto your side and bend your knees, drop your feet over the edge and push your body up with your arm. This should be one smooth motion.

To get into bed repeat the above but in the opposite order.

Movement

Your body must stay active to stay healthy. Regular exercises gives you strong bones, develops fit muscles, keeps you supple and fit and releases natural chemicals which reduce pain.

Bending

Do not bend at the hips to reach the floor, instead bend at the knees and squat to the floor, or go onto one knee in a lunge position and stand from there.

Lifting

Try not to lift anything heavy. If you do need to lift follow the advice above to pick it up. Try and distribute the load evenly between the right and left side. Have the heavier side closest to you and the lighter side further away. If necessary make multiple trips rather than overloading yourself.

Pain control

There are many treatments which can help back pain but they help to reduce the pain and do not cure your back pain. They allow you to get going again and manage the pain.

Pain killers

An anti-inflammatory medication may be useful but we recommend you speak to your Pharmacist for advice.

You usually will need to take pain killers for a day or two and occasionally you may need them for longer. Ensure you check the guidelines in the medication so that they do not react with other medications or existing medical problems you may have.

Hot / cold

Some find that a heat pack or ice pack is a very effective way of controlling pain. Do not use for more than 10 minutes and allow at least two hours before applying again. The hot or cold pack should be wrapped in a towel before applied to the skin.

Manual therapy

Manual therapy such as joint mobilisation and soft tissue massage can, in certain cases, be an effective way to improve movement of the back and reduce pain. This is only effective in certain cases and usually more effective in the early stages of pain.

The majority of back pain is not serious.

If however your back pain deteriorates and becomes severe instead of better it is recommended to see your GP.

It is also recommended to see your GP should you develop the following:

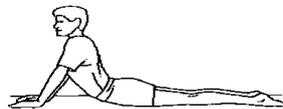
- Difficulty passing or controlling your urine
- Numbness around your back passage or genitals
- Numbness, pins and needles or weakness in both legs
- Unsteadiness on your feet
- A sudden increase in your pain

Mobilising exercises

Lie face down on the floor, place hands in a press up position. Push up on elbows, keeping hips on the floor. Relax slowly back down into starting position.



Lie down on the floor, place hands on the floor in press up position. Straighten your elbows and lift your trunk up as high as you can. Relax slowly back into the starting position.



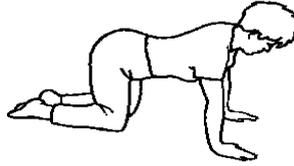
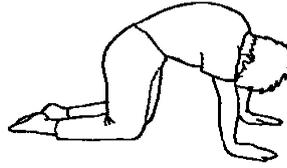
Lie on your back with legs bent up. Hug one knee onto your chest, hold for 5 – 10 seconds, and relax. Repeat with the other leg. Repeat with both legs together.



Lie on your back with legs bent up, keep your feet on the ground. Slowly roll both knees from side-to-side. Keep shoulders flat on the floor.



Kneel on all fours with hands and knees hip width apart. Pull your stomach in and tighten your stomach. Push your back up to the sky, letting your head drop down onto your chest. Hold 5 – 10 seconds. Relax, and then let your back hollow.



Kneel on all fours with hands and knees hip width apart. Keep your arms still and lower your bottom towards your heels. If able, slide your hands away from your body. Hold for 5 – 10 seconds, return to all fours.

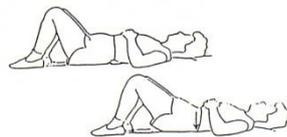


While sitting, slowly bend your chin onto your chest and keep curling your back down towards the floor. Hold for 2 – 3 seconds. Slowly straighten your back by uncurling so that you are sitting tall.



Strengthening exercises

Lie on your back with legs bent up. Place your hands in front of pelvis. Tighten stomach and buttocks so that the small of your back flattens against the bed/floor. Hold for 5 – 10 seconds and relax.

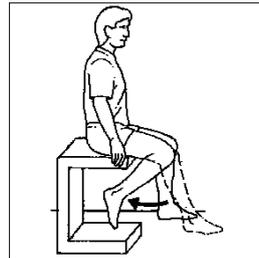


Slowly roll your pelvis and hold back up off the floor. Hold for 5 – 10 seconds. Slowly roll and lower back onto the floor.



Neural exercises—These should only be completed if prescribed by your physiotherapist

Sitting up tall, gently swing your knees backwards and forwards.



Holding on, stand with one leg over the edge of a step. Gently swing your leg backwards and forwards.



Contact us

Physiotherapy Department, Northwick Park Hospital, Watford Road, Harrow, HA1 3UJ

Tel: 020 8869 2229

Physiotherapy Department, Central Middlesex Hospital, Acton lane, park Royal. NW10 7NS

Tel: 020 8453 2242

General Trust information

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS is a confidential service for people who would like information, help or advice about the services provided by any of our hospitals. Please call 0800 783 4372 between 10am and 4pm or e-mail lnwh-tr.PALS@nhs.net. Please note that this service does not provide clinical advice so please contact the relevant department directly to discuss any concerns or queries about your upcoming test, examination or operation.

For a translation of this leaflet or for an English version in large print, audio or Braille please ask a member of staff or call 0800 783 4372.