

Why is it necessary for me to do back exercises?

Exercises help decrease pain and swelling by increasing the blood flow to the area. This 'flushes out' the chemicals responsible for inflammation and helps return fluid into the circulation from the damaged tissues.

Exercises are also necessary to maintain and restore normal movement and function of the affected joints, ligaments and muscles that may be affected.

Exercises

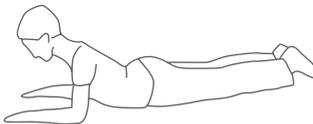
1. Lie on your back with your knees together and bent. While keeping your upper trunk still, slowly roll your knees from side to side. Repeat 10 times.



2. Lie on your back. Hug one knee towards your chest. Hold for 10 seconds then relax. Repeat 3 times on each leg.



3. Lying face down, lean up on your elbows/ forearms. Hold for 30 seconds then relax. Repeat 3 times.



4. Bend sideways at the waist. Repeat 10 times.



Patient Advice and Liaison Service

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) provides confidential help and advice to patients and carers. For further information please contact the PALS team on **020 8937 7173** or email pals@barnet.nhs.uk

If you require this information in large print, please contact the Communications Department on **020 8937 7644**

If you need an interpreter to explain this document, please telephone **020 8732 6454**

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Turkish Eğer bu belgeyi size birisinin tercüme etmesini istiyorsanız, lütfen şu numarayı arayın: 020 8732 6454

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Polish Jeżeli do wyjaśnienia niniejszego dokumentu potrzebny jest tłumacz, proszę zadzwonić pod numer 020 8732 6454

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Low back pain

Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service



What is the cause?

What is the cause of low back pain?

The majority of low back pain is not due to any serious cause. Most back pains come from the parts of your back that move - the muscles, ligaments and small joints - and occur because your back is not working or moving as it should.

Remember, most adults have at least one episode of low back pain in their lifetime - the majority of these settle down, and there is not often anything serious causing it.

Sprains and strains of the back can be part of every day life, for example pain caused by suddenly turning. This can cause a 'muscle spasm' type pain, where the body tries to protect the area by splinting the affected area. This can last for several days or weeks.

Sometimes the back pain also affects the leg - this is commonly known as 'sciatica'.

Another possible cause of back pain is 'wear and tear' of the joints or discs, which is also sometimes called spondylosis or osteoarthritis. This is part of the normal ageing process, but can be painful.

How long will it take to recover?

This will vary from person to person as it is influenced by a number of factors including: the severity of the problem, age, activity level, medication, pre-existing medical conditions, etc.

In general, most back injuries will feel significantly better within one week and completely better by about two weeks. If after two weeks you are still having significant pain, contact your GP as you may need a referral to physiotherapy to help regain full function.

How to help yourself

What can I do to help myself?

- What you do in the early stages of back pain is very important - generally it is not a good idea to rest for more than two days, as research shows you get stiff, your muscles and bones weaken, you lose physical fitness, you get depressed, and the longer you rest, the harder it is to get going again
- Modified activity - doing your daily tasks at a lower level of intensity - is recommended in the early stages
- Specific exercises to strengthen the back, and keep it flexible (see 'exercises' section overleaf) are recommended, as well as general exercise, such as walking or swimming, which help the body to release endorphins, a natural painkiller
- With new and severe pain, it may be helpful to take some painkillers. You can speak to your GP or a Pharmacist about which type is recommended for you
- Some people find applying heat or cold packs to the painful area can be helpful. Be careful that they are not applied directly to the skin, and that they are not left on for more than 15 minutes at a time.

When should I seek help and from whom?

You should see your GP as soon as possible if you have any of the following symptoms associated with your pain:

- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Worsening weakness of the legs, especially if it affects your walking

General advice

- Pins and needles or numbness in your 'saddle' (this is the area of your body that would be in contact with, for example, a bicycle seat)
- Onset of pins and needles or numbness in the legs which is worsening.

Occasionally low back pain can be caused by more serious problems such as stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal), fracture, osteoporosis (thinning of the bones), infection, tumour or inflammation.

General Advice

Overall, prevention is better than cure. Once this episode settles down, there are some key points to remember to prevent future flare ups:

- Don't sit for too long, especially in a poor position, eg: slumped in a chair
- Make sure when driving, your seat is adjusted correctly for your height, and that your lumbar curve (the curve that forms the hollow in your lower back) is supported. Also take breaks if on a long car journey
- If you have to lift and lower heavier objects, keep the weight close to your body and bend your knees
- Try to avoid long periods in a bent position, eg: gardening
- Take regular exercise that you enjoy!
- Try to stop smoking - research shows it can increase the time taken for tissues to heal.