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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Low Back Pain (1 of 3)

What is low back pain?

Back pain is very common – four out of five of us will suffer one or more episodes of back pain at some point in our life.

Most back pain is not due to any serious disease or damage to the spine. It can start very quickly and usually settles within a few days or weeks at the most.

What you do in the early stages is very important. The back is designed for movement and staying active will help you get better more quickly and prevent further back problems. People who cope the best with back pain are those who maintain an active lifestyle.

If your pain isn't improving your GP can refer you to a physiotherapist. Usually it is not helpful to do any X-rays or scans.

Dealing with an episode of low back pain

Pain Relief

- Simple pain killers can be used to help manage your pain. Ask your local pharmacist for advice. Please follow the instructions on the packet carefully.
- Your GP can prescribe stronger medication if required.
- You can apply cold or heat packs over the painful area for 10 minutes for short-term relief. Make sure you protect your skin from burns with a towel.

Keep active

Keeping active and maintaining your normal everyday activities will help you recover more quickly from back pain.

Try to stay at work or return as soon as possible even if your back pain is still present. The longer you stay off work, the more you are at risk of developing long-term problems and it can become harder to return to work. If you feel your work is difficult or unsafe to do because of your pain, speak to your manager as you may be able to alter your role temporarily.

Do not stay in stationary positions such as sitting or standing. Change position at least every 30 minutes. Stay mobile to avoid becoming stiff.

Walking and swimming are good forms of regular exercise.

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Posture

Good posture is important as this will help the healing process and help prevent the pain from getting worse. Regularly sit up straight.

Sitting Don't sit in low chairs that allow your bottom to sink below your knees. Don't slouch.

Sleeping Most people benefit from having a medium to firm mattress. The mattress should be comfortable but firm enough to support the spine when lying on your back or side.

Lifting and bending Try not to bend forwards; use your hips and knees to bend rather than your back. Try not to lift and twist where possible.

Driving Have your car seat fairly upright and raise your chair height if possible. A small rolled towel placed in the back may help support a better posture.

Exercises

Be positive and keep moving! There are many things you can do to help the healing process.

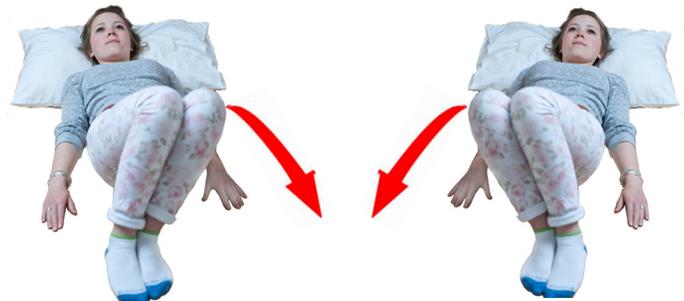
You must start active exercise within 4 days of injuring your back. This will help to increase the mobility in the back and therefore reduce the pain.

Try the following exercises regularly through the day. They should be done slowly, moving into discomfort but not into excessive pain.

1) Lumbar rotation

Lying on your back, gently roll your knees from side to side in a slow controlled way and as far as you feel comfortable to go.

Repeat 10 times to each side.



2) Lumbar extension

When standing or lying on your front, gently arch your back backwards as far as you feel comfortable to go.

Repeat 10 times.



3) Side flexion stretch

Slide your hand sideways along your outer thigh as far as you feel comfortable to go. Do not lean forwards.

Repeat 10 times to each side.



If you find the exercises are making the pain worse, stop doing them and speak to your GP or physiotherapist.

Warning signs

If you have severe pain, which gets worse over several weeks, or if you are unwell for example have a fever, you should see your GP.

If you develop any of these symptoms you should see your GP straight away:

- difficulty passing urine or controlling your bowels
- numbness around your back passage or genitals
- numbness or pins and needles in both feet
- weakness in both legs or unsteadiness on your feet.

Further information

The NHS Clinical Knowledge Summaries are a reliable source of evidence-based information and practical 'know how' about the common conditions managed in primary care. On the website you will find good information about low back pain and many other conditions.

www.cks.nhs.uk

NHS Choices is the online 'front door' to the NHS. It is the country's biggest health website and gives all the information you need to make choices about your health. On the website you will find information on a wide range of conditions including back pain.

www.nhs.uk