

Caring for your...Short term low back pain (acute)

Most short term low back pain gets better quickly – often within a month, although it's not unusual to keep having niggles. If your back pain follows a major physical accident, gets worse when you lie down, or is linked with things like weight loss or fever, tell your doctor. This leaflet is for short term (acute) low back pain only.

Staying active and having a positive attitude will help speed your recovery

The best person to manage your low back pain is YOU. If you take steps to help yourself, you'll get better quicker. The choices you make, the way you think and the things you do are important. You need to keep active, stay positive and:

- Try to get back to your usual daily activities and work as soon as possible. Set your own recovery goals, develop a plan and stick to it
- modify activities only if they cause severe pain
- make sure you take regular pain relief as directed; don't try to "tough it out" –avoid bed rest

Don't take back pain lying down Using your back normally, helps you get better. So, even though you may be in some pain (this does not mean you're causing damage to your back), try to stay active. Using simple painkillers such as paracetamol can help. Your doctor or pharmacist can advise you on the pain relief that is best for you.

See your doctor or nearest hospital emergency department urgently if you have:

- numbness in the groin or anal area
- loss of bladder or bowel control
- developed an unusual way of walking (gait)

At your first doctor's visit You will be checked to ensure you have short term low back pain and if so your doctor will reassure you of this. For most people blood tests, x-rays or other special scans won't be needed.

Think positively Keep reminding yourself that you will get better. Set yourself daily goals such as doing the housework, going out, and exercising. Think about how you can make these things easier. Steadily and in stages increase the things you do until you are able to do all of your normal everyday activities and tasks. You will have good days and bad days - that's normal.

Exercise Early on it may be best to avoid demanding or heavy contact sports (like rugby). While these sports are unlikely to be harmful, they may bother your back pain. In stages increase your fitness by walking, cycling, and/or swimming for 20-30 minutes daily. Setting aside a little time every day and staying keen is the key.

Tips for comfort Wear comfortable shoes with low heels, use an upright chair with low back support, ensure your work surface is at a comfortable height, sleep on a firm mattress (place boards under it

if necessary). If you sleep on your back, try a pillow under your knees and if on your side, between your knees. Do things that help you relax such as walking, listening to music or having a bath.

What if it happens again? Many people have back pain more than once, but that doesn't mean it is serious. Improving your fitness will help reduce the chance of having back pain again.

When to seek help If after trying pain killers you are still in a lot of pain or find that it holds you back from getting going again, see your doctor. Other therapies such as spinal manipulation may be recommended to help.

Seek help from your doctor, hospital emergency department, or A&M clinic urgently, if you have numbness in the groin or anal area, loss of bowel or bladder control, or have developed an unusual way of walking (gait).

Getting back to work The sooner you get back to work (both paid and unpaid) the sooner you'll get better and the less likely your back will become a long term problem. Most people find that going to work for even part of the day is worthwhile. If you are in paid work, it's a good idea to talk with your employer and treatment provider about ways that you can return to work safely. In some jobs, especially those that involve heavy lifting, bending or twisting, job tasks may need to be adjusted while you get better. You need to consider the things you are required to do, and with your treatment provider and employer talk about:

–the things that you consider you can still do –the things that you may have problems with, and ways that you think you can get around these difficulties

–other problems that may need to be dealt with, how you can solve them and who you need to talk to about them.

Depending on your situation your treatment provider may recommend you do different job tasks for a while and/or return to work in stages.