

YOUR BACK PAIN



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When to seek further advice

Less than 1% of patients who see their GP regarding back pain will have a serious problem.

HOWEVER:

There are a number of warning signs that may require you to speak to your GP if you have:

- Had a recent trauma/fall that caused your back pain to start
 - A previous history of cancer
 - If you are taking long-term steroid tablets or have osteoporosis
 - If you have a fever or are generally unwell
 - Unsteadiness on your feet or tripping over your feet
 - Unexplained weight loss
- Equina syndrome (CES) is a serious condition involving the nerves at the bottom of the spinal cord and is a medical emergency requiring urgent medical attention. If you present with one or more of the following symptoms seek medical attention via A+E;
 - Severe low back pain that doesn't improve
 - Loss of bladder or bowel control (such as urinary retention or incontinence)
 - Numbness or tingling around your genitals or back passage
 - Recent onset of sexual dysfunction
 - Loss of reflexes in the extremities
 - Weakness, sensory loss or pain in one, or more commonly, both legs.



Cauda

<http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/conditions/back-pain/should-i-see-a-doctor.aspx>

Further reading

If you would like to know more about what you can do to look after your back in future consider using the resources below to help you:

Websites:

- ◆ NHS choices:
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pages/hub.aspx>
- ◆ Arthritis Research UK:
<http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/>
- ◆ Solent NHS
<http://www.solent.nhs.uk>
- ◆ Chartered society of Physiotherapy
<http://ww.csp.org.uk>

Library:

- ◆ 'The Back Book: the Best Way to Deal with Back Pain: Get Back Active' by Martin Roland, Gordon Waddell and Jennifer Moffett (2002)
- ◆ https://backaholic.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/the_back_book-2.pdf

Facts & Statistics

- Low back pain is an extremely common problem, and a **normal part of daily life**. It affects 80% of all individuals at some point in their lifetime .
- It is the most **common cause** of job disability and leading contributor to missed days at work.
- Serious damage is **very rare** .
- About 19 in 20 cases of acute (sudden onset) low back pain is **classified as 'non-specific'**. Which means there is no clear cause of the pain. In some cases, pain may be due to a possible over-stretch of a ligament or muscle.
- Most lower back pains are classified as acute, or short term. They **normally only last a few days or weeks** and tend to **resolve on their own** with self-care.

- Current UK guidelines suggest that **x-rays and scans should not be carried out routinely**. This is because, for most acute low back pains, further investigations do not help with diagnosis and are unlikely to change your treatment plan.
- In some cases **scans can even be misleading**. Results can sometimes show 'degeneration' or 'a disc bulge'. This may sound frightening but can be related to normal changes with age and aren't necessarily the cause of your symptoms.
- With certain symptoms X-rays and scans can help detect serious spinal injuries/conditions, but they **do not normally help with non-specific low back pain**.
- Your back is designed for lots of movement. Remember, **structural damage to this area is rare**. The sooner you get moving and return to normal activities, the sooner you will feel better.
- The **people that cope best with back pain are those who stay active** and try to get on with life despite pain.

Community Centres



Community centres are a good way to ease into exercise.

They offer a wide range of activities and exercise classes for all ages, from beginners to advanced.

Typical exercise classes offered can include yoga, karate, zumba and pilates, but centres in your area may offer more options.

To find out what classes your local community centres offer you can either contact them directly or seek more information by contacting your local Council:

Southampton: By telephone: 02380 833000

Or website:

<https://www.southampton.gov.uk/people-places/community-places-rights/>

Portsmouth: By Telephone: 023 9283 4171

Or Website: <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/ext/community/community-centres>

Posture tips for laptop users

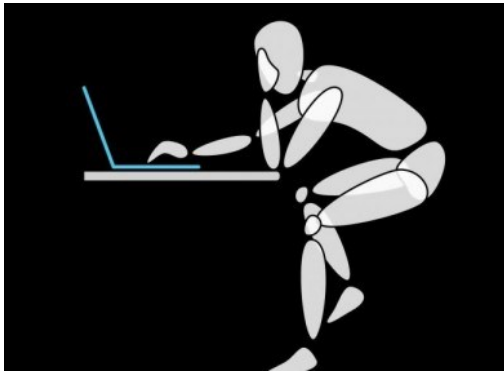
Laptops allow us to be able to work more flexibly, but they can also contribute to work-related back, neck and shoulder problems.

Here are some ways you can be more comfortable using your laptop:

Use your laptop on a stable base and not on your lap so your arms can be supported

Use a separate keyboard and mouse so the laptop can be put on a stand and the screen set at eye level.

Take regular breaks.



Get into good habits before the aching starts. Neck, shoulder and back pains gradually build up over time.

Consider changing your chair and desk height to suit you

An infographic with a light blue background and a white, rounded rectangular shape with a blue outline and a yellow drop shadow. It contains two sections, each with a 'Myth' and a 'Fact'.

Myth#1 **Fact:**
Moving will make my back pain worse
People fear twisting and bending but it's essential to keep moving. Gradually increase how much you are doing, and stay on the go.

Myth#2 **Fact:**
I should avoid exercise, especially weight training
Back pain shouldn't stop you enjoying exercise or regular activities. In fact, studies found that continuing with these can help you get better sooner including using weights where appropriate.

Myth#3

A scan will show me exactly what is wrong

Fact:

Sometimes it will, but most often it won't. Also, even people without back pain have changes in their spine so scans can cause fear that influences behaviour, making the problem worse.

Myth#4

Pain equals damage

Fact:

This was the established view but more recent research has changed our thinking. Modern physio takes a holistic approach that helps people understand why they are in pain.

Exercise continued...

Specific exercises for your back can help relieve tension and maintain good movement. Below you can see some simple exercises that you can try at home.

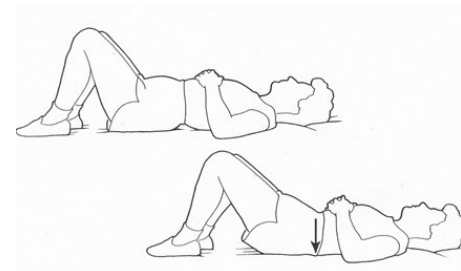


Knee Hugs:

Lying on your back hug one, or both knees into your chest and hold for up to 30 seconds. Then relax your leg down and

Knee Rolls:

Lying on your back with your knees bent, gently move your knees to one side, then another. Repeat this action approximately 8-10 times on either side.



Pelvic tilts:

Lying on your back with knees bent, push your lower back into the floor, then gently arch your back away by moving your pelvis. Repeat this approximately 8-10 times.

Visit solent.nhs.uk ; search MSK physiotherapy, then follow the link and click on the Resources tab to access videos on the exercises above.

Exercise

Being active is great for weight loss, improved mood, reducing the risk of heart disease and maintaining health of bones, muscles and ligaments. Below there is information on several schemes around Southampton which offer advice and help with exercise programmes and other aspects of keeping healthy.

Exercise on referral

The Active Nation Exercise Referral Scheme is a scheme whereby a GP or registered nurse can refer suitable patients into a supported exercise programme. An activity programme is created focussing on your abilities. These can include both supervised activities as well as individual, and group sessions. Inclusion and exclusion criteria apply.

For more information. see your GP or go to:

Southampton:
www.activenation.org.uk

Portsmouth:
www.bhlive.org.uk/leisure

Healthy Living

These services provide support to help people set goals to make healthier choices. This includes options such as having a health check, stopping smoking, cutting down on alcohol intake, becoming more active and eating a healthier diet. Individual support is offered as well as group sessions.

Access to this service is through self referral, by contacting:

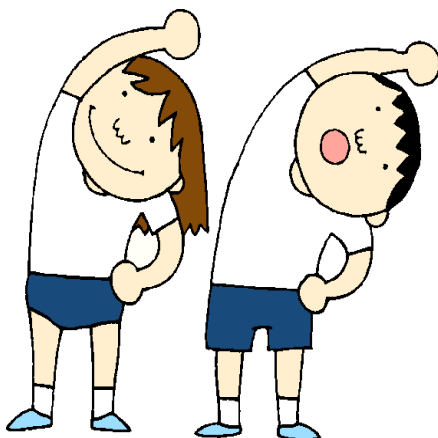
Southampton:

Southamptonhealthyliving.org.uk

or call: 0300 123 3791

Portsmouth:

**One You Wellbeing Service call:
02392 294001**



Understanding pain

Sharp/ stabbing
Shooting
Throbbing
Aching
Burning

Short-term injury or back pain episodes are often not serious in cause and usually settle within 6-12 weeks. Even muscular spasm can cause agonizing pain levels, but severe pain is NOT always an indicator of serious problem.

“Is it normal to get aches and pains?”

Yes! But if its not getting better, when do you see someone?

Pain is even harder to address if it becomes 'persistent' or 'chronic'.

Think about the 12 week period.

If the pain is not showing signs of improvement, or you are concerned that you are experiencing other worrying symptoms—seek advice from a registered health professional! (see page 19 for more information on when to seek advice).

Pain Aggravation



Stress and anxiety are well known to have an affect on pain, so addressing these factors can help you manage your pain better. If you would like help in dealing with this, you can refer yourself to Steps 2 Wellbeing online at:

Southampton: <http://www.steps2wellbeing.co.uk/>

Portsmouth: <https://www.bhlive.org.uk/leisure>

Or you can ask your GP to refer you if you would prefer.

Pain medication

If you are struggling with pain then seek advice from your GP or local pharmacist as they may suggest you try other medication. There are many different types of medication such as for inflammatory, muscle or nerve pain.

Pain often alters the way we move, which in itself can lead to more pain. It is important to take medication if needed so that you can stay as active as possible while your pain is settling.

Keeping comfortable continued...

The best person to reduce the risk of back pain

occurring is you!

Your posture is incredibly important in helping you to manage your back pain. **We are not designed to stay in one position** for a long time so **move often** and **take regular breaks** from your desk or work station.



What changes can I make at home or at work?

- Vary your tasks and avoid staying in one position for too long; you can do this by standing up or sitting down, or even stretches in your chair.
- Recognise when you could be overloading/ overstraining
- Avoid continuously repeating movements that aggravate your pain too much
- If carrying heavy loads is uncomfortable can someone help you?

If you feel you need more advice about changing your posture at work visit the Health and Safety Executive website to complete the DSE self assessment on this link: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.htm>

Keeping comfortable

Simple things such as changing your posture at home during daily activities can help you manage your back pain.

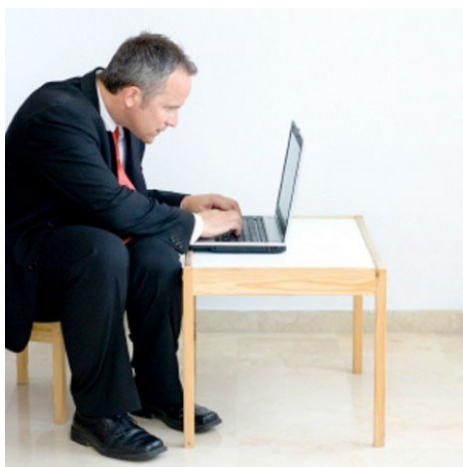
Things to consider:

Sleep right: Give your back lots of support while you sleep. Find a mattress that is not too firm but not too soft either. Sleeping with a pillow between your knees whilst side lying can be more comfortable.



- ⇒ Place heavy items at a comfortable height where you do not need to bend or twist to lift them up.
- ⇒ If lifting is a problem, try doing several trips for household activities such as clothes/washing

Making sure chairs and seating are at a suitable height to use and comfortable for your back



Pain Management

Apart from medication there are a number of different ways that you can manage your pain. These include the use of heat, gentle movements and pain relief gels.

Heat



Use either a hot water bottle or wheat bag. Ensure it is not in direct contact with your skin by wrapping it in a towel. Put it on the affected area for 10-15 minutes.

Cold



Use either an ice pack or bag of frozen vegetables. Ensure it is not in direct contact with your skin by wrapping it in a towel. Put it on the affected area for 10-15 minutes.

Pain relief gels

Simple pain relief gels can be bought from your local chemist, however if you would like more advice speak to your GP or Pharmacist.

“My pain reappears every now and then, how should I manage it?”

It's important to remember that everybody is different, and no one treatment may work the same, even for similar problems.

The most commonly used are:

1. **Maintain gentle activity** – prolonged rest is often not helpful and can delay recovery. Gradually introducing gentle exercises will help maintain flexibility and function.
2. **Pain relief/medication** – remember that well-managed pain can allow you to keep moving and make progress! It is important to follow the instructions on the box and take the medication as directed for it to be most effective. Seek advice from your GP or pharmacist if you are struggling.
3. **Using heat or cold** — does a hot water bottle give even temporary relief? Does it respond better with an ice pack? There is nothing to say that one works better; it's personal preference.
4. **A home exercise programme** – ideally this will have been given to you by a registered Health Care Professional, to ensure it is suitable for both your level and presentation of symptoms. Keeping a copy of previously helpful exercises can be useful during a flare up.
5. **Acupuncture, massage + manipulation (cracking)** – there is poor evidence for these with long term pain, however they may help manage pain during a short-term “flare up” or recurrence.

Lifestyle modification/active lifestyle

You're having flare ups/ reoccurrences more frequently – but why?

“ Are you doing the same thing over and over, and expecting different results?”

- **After your last flare up settled** – did you think about what might have contributed?
- **Is the pain related to specific activity?** - If yes, can it be changed slightly?
- **Activity is important** – the spine and surrounding tissues work best with activity and regular movement!
- **Try to address fear avoidance behaviours** – Are you avoiding certain movements or activities in fear of pain? Have your family/friends noticed you moving more rigidly? Try to avoid this and move as normally as possible.
- **Be mindful of life stresses** – there is a very strong link between personal stress, depression and anxiety with acute back pain. Has there been any change to your working day/ personal life causing more stress that could have been an aggravating factor?