

Patient Information

Acute low back pain – managing your pain

The facts

Your spine is strong and is designed to move and support your body.

Most people will have back pain at some point in their lives. Recovery varies from person to person but generally it settles in weeks.

It is not always possible to pin-point the cause of your pain. However, it is not necessary to know the specific cause in order to manage the pain effectively.

Sometimes pain arising from the back can extend to your buttock or leg and is usually on one side. Sometimes the leg pain can be worse than the back.

Stress and tension can increase the pain you feel, so try to reduce these to help manage the pain better.

What can I do to help myself?

Staying active: When the pain has just started you may need to rest especially if it is severe. However, long periods of lying down and inactivity are not helpful.

If your pain extends to your buttock or leg try to find a position that eases this as well. Moving around even a little bit helps you to recover better.

Don't try to beat the pain by continuing with an activity that makes it worse. Instead, adjust what you are doing or change position for a period of time and see if that helps.

Strike a balance between rest and activity taking breaks and acknowledging to yourself that things may take longer to do perform.

Heat and cold: A cold pack or local heat can be used for short-term symptomatic relief to allow you to move easier. Some people prefer cold or a combination used alternately.

Taking medication: Talk to your GP or local pharmacy about painkillers or anti-inflammatories. Do take them as prescribed. Don't wait for the pain to get out of control before taking them as they may help you to regain your movement more comfortably.

Are scans and x-rays necessary?

X-rays and scans and blood tests are not needed in the majority of cases. They will not help with your pain and will not help you move your back towards recovery.

Warning Signs

Work with your doctor to manage your pain and address any concerns that you have.

If you have severe pain that is getting worse over several weeks, or if you are unwell with back pain, consult your doctor.

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The following symptoms are very rare, but if you suddenly develop any of them, you should consult your doctor straightaway.

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

More information

You might find the following websites useful:

A detailed guide to back pain management - www.sheffieldbackpain.com

A four page advice sheet - www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/23068686

More detailed information - www.arc.org.uk/arthritis/patpubs/6002/6002.asp

Detailed information especially in relation to work related issues - www.backcare.org.uk

Telephone help-line - 0870 9500275

The Back book – a good book written by a team consisting of a GP, orthopaedic surgeon, physiotherapist, osteopath and psychologist and provides comprehensive advice. This can be ordered on-line or from most bookshops (ISBN 10 0117029491). A DVD is also available.

Comments, Compliments, Complaints

We welcome any comments or complaints as it helps us to provide a better service. We especially want to hear if you have received a particularly good service. Please contact PALS below.

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) – details below.

Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Patient Information

Other formats

This information is available in alternative formats such as large print or electronically on request. Interpreters can also be booked. Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) offices, found in the main reception areas:

Conquest Hospital

Email: **palsh@esht.nhs.uk** - Telephone: **01424 758090**

Eastbourne District General Hospital

Email: **palse@esht.nhs.uk** - Telephone: **01323 435886**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

This leaflet was produced by East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, NHS East Sussex Downs and Weald, NHS Hastings and Rother and The Horder Centre, East Sussex.

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