



West Berkshire Physiotherapy Service Leaflet 1 Low Back Pain

Back pain is very common. Most people recover very quickly. Often recovery is within 6 weeks. Our backs are designed to keep moving, so rest in bed tends to make the problem worse.

Most back pain is not due to any serious disease. However, if you develop any of the following symptoms, consult your doctor immediately:

1. Pins and needles in both legs
2. Numbness between the tops of your legs or genital region
3. Difficulty passing urine or incontinence of bowels
4. Increasing weakness in your legs

It is normal to get back pain more than once in your life but this does not mean it is a serious problem. Most people with backache do not have any damage to their spine.

During an acute attack there are a number of things you can do to help control the pain

1. Take painkillers regularly for the first day or two. You may need to take them for a few weeks. Be guided by your doctor or pharmacist but Paracetamol is often the most effective.
2. Modify normal activity until the acute pain eases.
3. An ice pack wrapped in a damp towel may help. Alternatively place a warm water bottle (in a cover) on the painful area. Use either of these regularly for up to 20 minutes each time.

Sleeping

Use whatever position is most comfortable and use pillows to support you if necessary. Try a firm base under the mattress or put the mattress on the floor. Don't stay in bed too long. Don't lie on the sofa.

Sitting

Use an upright chair with a rolled towel in the small of your back for comfort. Always sit with your back against the back of the chair and your feet on the floor. Get up and move regularly (e.g. every 20 minutes)

Driving

Take regular breaks on long journeys. During a break, walk and stretch your back. Gentle neck and shoulder movements will help ease tense muscles and stiff joints. Adjust your seat and use a rolled towel in the small of your back for comfort/support. Do not poke your chin forward or grip the wheel too tightly. Follow the car's guidelines and adjust the head restraint to suit you. If positioned correctly it will help to reduce the effect of a whiplash injury.

Fitness and Activity

Physically fit people generally get less back pain and recover faster. Swimming, cycling or short walks are good ways of keeping your fitness, even while you still have backache. After an acute attack, build up your activities slowly over several days and once back to full activity, **keep going!**

At Work

Stay at work if possible, otherwise return to your job as soon as you can, even if you still have some discomfort. If standing for a long time, put one foot on a low shelf e.g. telephone directory or bottom of a sink unit.

In the Office

Make sure your chair fits you and supports your back. Change positions frequently and stretch. Arrange desk, files, computer, telephone etc, so that you do not have to twist to use them.

Bending

When you have acute back pain you should limit activities that involve bending forwards. It may be easier to kneel for activities such as making the bed.

Manual Work; Gardening and Housework

Modify activity early on but get back to normal as soon as possible. Have more frequent breaks during activities. Learn how to lift properly - use your legs to take the strain.

Exercises

Your back is designed for movement. The sooner you get back to normal activity, the sooner your back will feel better. Here are some exercises to help you do this. **START GENTLY** with the exercises and as you feel able, increase the range and number of repetitions. Start with 2 or 3 times a day, 5 repetitions.

1. Pull one knee in to chest until a comfortable stretch is felt in the lower back and buttocks. As it gets easier, straighten out the other leg. Repeat 5 times each leg



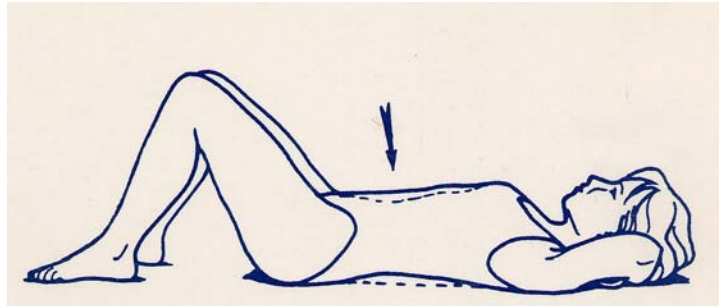
- 2 Lying on your back, knees bent, roll knees from side to side from the waist. Keep tummy gently pulled in.

Repeat 5 times each side



3. Lying on your back, with both knees bent. Keep your head relaxed back on the floor. Now pull in the abdominal muscle towards your backbone. Your back should not move. Hold for 10 seconds.

Repeat 5 times



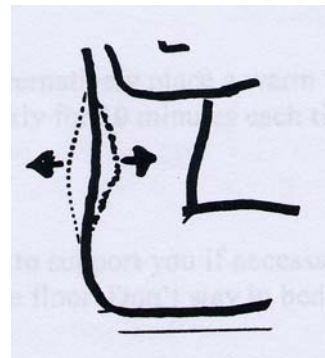
4. Lying on your front, straighten your elbows so that you lift your head and shoulders off the floor and your back becomes arched. Like a lazy press-up. Initially you may only rise up onto your elbows.

Repeat 5 times



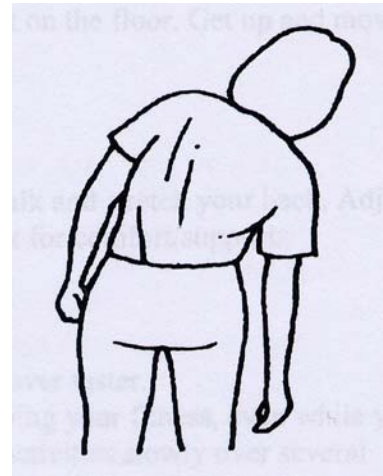
5. Sit up straight, with bottom at back of chair. Push lower back into the back of the chair and then hollow the lower back away from the chair. Keep feet flat on floor.

Repeat 5 times regularly



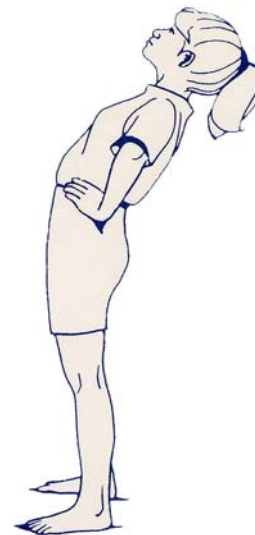
6. In the standing position, slide your hand down the outside of your legs, to the right and left.

Repeat 5 times each side



7. In the standing position, bend backwards from the shoulders. Do not let your hips move forwards.

Repeat 5 times



If after 4 to 6 weeks your backache is not improving, go back and see your doctor. A delay in recovery rarely means that it is a serious problem, just that you may need some extra help to deal with it.



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