



# Information on **Acute Low Back Pain**



# Table of Contents

Introduction .....3

Things to watch out for .....4

Possible Causes of Lower Back Problems .....5

Managing 'Acute' Lower Back Problems .....6

Other advice and things to try .....7

# Introduction

Lower back problems are very common, affecting around 85% of the general population at some point in their lives.

Despite being painful and distressing, most episodes of back pain are not due to any serious damage or disease.

Most low back pain episodes will begin to fade on their own within two weeks and settle within six weeks.

Often the cause of lower back problems is not certain and the best course of action is to concentrate on the things that may help

Read on to find more advice for Acute low back pain (Back pain that is less than 6 weeks old)

If your symptoms are caused by a significantly traumatic incident to your back (e.g. a fall, car accident), please have this checked out by a health professional before attempting to follow the advice in this booklet.

This is especially important if you have underlying low bone density (e.g. osteoporosis) or are taking long-term steroid medications on a long term basis



# Things to watch out for

**In very rare cases lower back related problems require immediate attention.**

Some of the warning signs of one such problem (**cauda equina syndrome**) include:

- Loss of feeling/pins and needles between your inner thighs or genitals.
- Altered sensation and/or pain consistently in both legs at the same time.
- Numbness in or around your back passage or buttocks.
- Changes to bladder function, such as loss of sensation, loss of control or an inability to empty your bladder.
- Sexual problems such as loss of vaginal sensation or inability to achieve an erection or ejaculate.

**If you experience any of the above contact your GP or  NHS 111 immediately.**

If you are experiencing any other unusual or concerning symptoms alongside your back pain please get in touch with your GP or  NHS 111.

## Possible causes of Lower Back Problems

A sprain/strain - for example; lifting something awkwardly or something that is too heavy for what you are physically conditioned for.

An unusual increase or decrease in your normal activity levels.

A number of other factors have been associated with lower back problems including; Periods of increased stress, worry or low mood.

Poor sleep, fatigue, smoking or being run down are factors also associated with low back pain.

Occasionally people with low back pain will also have related leg pain.

If you have low back related leg pain you may have sciatica or lumbar spinal stenosis.

About half of people with sciatica, (a type of low back related leg pain) will have significant improvement by 12 weeks without any specific treatment.

You can find out more about sciatica and other back pain related conditions on our website:

 <https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/your-health/health-services/msk-physiotherapy/lower-back/>



# Managing 'Acute' Lower Back Problems

Your back is a strong and stable structure that is designed for movement.

There is strong evidence that keeping active and gradually returning to all your usual activities and exercise is important to help your recovery.

For the first few days after your back pain starts, modifying or reducing your activities may help.

You should avoid complete bedrest as this can make things worse.

Try to stay at work, or return as soon as you are able. Sometimes a graded return can be helpful. Speak to your employer or a health professional about this.

Changing position regularly may help. For instance, if sitting causes pain and your job involves long periods of sitting, moving around more and adopting varied and relaxed postures may be helpful.

It is normal to experience some pain during your recovery.

Remember hurt doesn't always equal harm and your back is strong and resilient.

Good sleep habits and managing stress can also help you cope better and help your pain.



## Other advice and things to try

Painkillers and anti-inflammatory drugs can be helpful to control your pain initially and allow you to start moving more easily. A GP or Pharmacist can help with this. It can be more helpful to take these as prescribed on a regular basis for a period of time rather than waiting until your pain becomes unbearable.

Hot or cold compresses may provide some **short term** relief when applied to the affected areas for 10 minutes. **Be sure to cover the compress to protect your skin from burns.** This is best used before and/or after exercise.

You can use gentle exercises at home to help you to start moving more easily and restore your normal range of movement. There are many examples with video demonstrations on our website:  <https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/your-health/health-services/msk-physiotherapy/lower-back/>

You can also try any other form of exercise you enjoy. Some low impact examples include; walking, yoga, gardening, swimming and cycling.

## Further info & Resources

If you are finding your symptoms are not improving and would like to get some help from a Physiotherapist please visit this website to download a self-referral form or contact your GP

 <https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/your-health/health-services/msk-physiotherapy/how-to-access-the-msk-physiotherapy-service/>

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy advice about low back pain

 <https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/10-things-you-need-know-about-your-back>

Inspired by work curated by Adam Dobson and the South Tee's back pain triage and treat website:  <https://www.southtees.nhs.uk/services/back-pain-triage-and-treat/>

