

Acute Low Back Pain

Understanding Low Back Pain

Low back pain is very common with around 80-90% of adults having some sort of back pain in their lifetime. Most low back pain is short term and gets better quickly, often within a month.



There are lots of muscles, ligaments and joints in the lower back, therefore a specific diagnosis of a particular structure causing the pain is often difficult to make.

The good news is that as long as serious causes are excluded, the exact cause of the pain is not required to effectively treat your back.

Know the facts

- Staying active, continuing your usual activities as much as possible and avoiding bed rest are very important in helping your recovery and will not cause harm.
- Pain does not necessarily mean you are causing damage.
- The pain will settle – most people make an excellent recovery.
- X-rays and other tests are not usually needed in the first 4 – 6 weeks (ask your health care professional).
- Serious back injuries or disease that requires specialist treatment do happen, but are not common.
- If you have numbness in the groin or anal area, lose bladder or bowel control and have weakness in the legs, you must see a doctor or contact the nearest emergency department urgently.

Tips to help your recovery

- Remain active and keep moving. Bed rest is known to be bad for recovery. Try to do all the things you normally do at work and home and add in walking on the flat if you don't already do this. Some tasks that involve heavy lifting or twisting may need to be modified.
- With prolonged bed rest your muscles will get weaker and you will stiffen up, which may prolong the length of time you have low back pain. This can start to happen in as little as 48 hours.
- Take the medication that has been prescribed for you by your Doctor. The medications should help by reducing the pain, which will allow you to move about more easily.
- While sleeping at night it is likely that you will be most comfortable on your side, with the painful side on top. This is particularly true if you also have leg pain that is coming from your back.
- Avoid prolonged sitting or standing. Regularly change position and stretch often.
- Posture is very important. Have your shoulders relaxed back and you should feel tall. Good posture allows your muscles and joints to work efficiently.
- If you are taking stronger painkillers, you should drink plenty of water and eat fruit to avoid constipation.

Follow up treatment

- Seek advice from your doctor and physiotherapist for the correct exercises for you.
- Follow up with your local doctor if your pain changes, is not controlled by your pain medications or if you develop different symptoms.

