



LBP Information & Exercise

# Managing Lower Back Pain

Your ability to self-manage  
your back pain should  
improve within  
**6 weeks**  
of following this advice

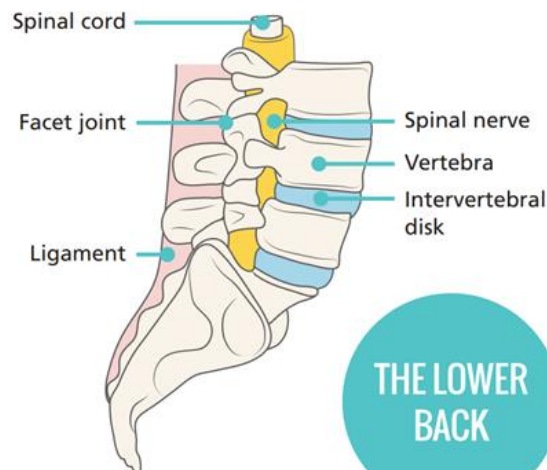
## What is Lower Back Pain?

It is extremely common. About 9 out of 10 people will get it at least once in their life. Lower back pain (LBP) is pain that is felt over the lower (lumbar) region of the spine. It frequently occurs for no reason - which can be very frustrating. Acute LBP (0-6 weeks) can be extremely severe and affect your ability to perform your daily tasks. Most episodes of LBP resolve within 6 weeks with or without specific management.

Persistent LBP is pain that occurs for more than 3 months. Just like a paper cut, the amount of pain is not related to the degree of damage.

## Your spine is strong and back problems are rarely due to any serious disease or damage.

Your spine is one of the strongest parts of your body and it is very difficult to damage. It is a flexible column made of chunky bones (vertebrae) joined by discs to make it flexible. Sturdy ligaments protect this column and it is reinforced by a strong corset of muscles. The spinal cord and nerves are protected by this stable structure. This design allows us to bend, rotate, twist, carry and lift.



## What are the causes?

### Non-specific;

Non-specific back pain could be general stiffness, weakness, lack of exercise, posture related or a strain. It can also be associated with sudden injuries whilst lifting or playing sports. This type of pain often gets better in several weeks with exercise and advice.

### Degenerative (Osteoarthritis / Spondylosis);

X-ray studies of backs show that 43% of men and 25% of women over the age of 50 will have arthritic changes. Not all these people will experience LBP. However, this can be aggravated by a sudden 'jolt' or change in activity.

### Sciatica;

When the nerves that come out of the lower back are irritated, they can cause pain, tingling and numbness down the leg(s). This can go down as far as the calf and the foot. This may feel worse than the back pain but will usually start to improve in 6-8 weeks.

### Rare causes;

Infection, tumour, fracture or inflammation may occur in less than 1% of cases.

## Symptoms

Your symptoms may include the following in a small or large area of the back, with or without pain in one or both legs;

- Aching
- Burning
- Stabbing
- Shooting pains
- Pins and needles / numbness

The pain we experience can often be increased due to non-biological factors such as ;

- Psychological - Fear of damage, not getting better and feeling emotional.
- Physical - Protecting the back and fear of movement.
- Social - Difficult relationships at work or home, low job satisfaction and life events such as a family death.

## Management

### Exercise and keep moving

Exercise is really good for your back and can relieve pain. Moving will make you stronger. The exercises below are a great starting point but any light fitness training will be good for your back. Consider doing some gentle daily walking, cycling, dancing or swimming. Pick something that you enjoy. You will recover faster if you keep doing your normal every day activities and work using pain killers as needed.

You may need to reduce your painful activities for a couple of days but try to keep moving as much as you are able, even if it's slowly at first.

It is important to understand that 'hurt does not equal harm' and 'pain does not equal damage'. Research shows us that you will recover faster if you stay at work or get back to work as early as possible. Don't worry if your back hurts at work, speak to your manager about work concerns and doing lighter tasks if necessary. Don't sit for too long and make sure you change position regularly. Re introduce heavier activities gradually. Avoid bed rest during the day.

## Pain Relief

### Ice/Heat

Initially it may help to use a covered ice pack to ease your pain. Alternatively heat can sooth pain so a covered heat pack may also be used. If using heat/ice packs start with 5 minutes but no more than 15 minutes, 3 to 4 times per day.

Use a damp towel between yourself and ice to prevent any cold burns. Use a dry towel between yourself and the heat to prevent heat burns. Regularly check your skin while using ice or heat and remove immediately if the skin looks red. Do not use heat or ice if you have abnormal skin sensation.

Use Ice for Pain relief or after activity/exercise.

Use heat for pain relief or before activity/exercise.

## Pain Medication

Over the counter pain relief or anti-inflammatory medication can be used to reduce your pain so you can be more active or complete your exercises.

All medications have side effects and must be used carefully. Paracetamol and ibuprofen are the most common over the counter pain killers. However, some medical conditions will prevent you from taking them so you should always check with your GP or Pharmacist to ensure they are safe for you.

If you decide to take pain medication it is important to take them at the recommended dose and to take them regularly to prevent a flare up of your symptoms and allow you to remain active and continue exercising.

Don't wait until your pain is severe before taking the pain killers as they won't work as well.

## Diet

There is no specific diet to help with your back pain. It is important that you maintain a healthy, balanced diet to prevent excessive weight gain. Weight gain may increase strain on your back and aggravate your symptoms. If you are taking pain-killers you should drink plenty of fluids and eat foods high in fibre such as fruit and vegetables to avoid constipation.

## Avoid Bed Rest

It is essential to avoid complete bed rest. This can increase your pain, slow down your recovery time, reduce your strength and fitness, lower your mood and take longer to get going again.

## Stress

Stress can make your pain worse. Reduce stress with relaxation and maintain a positive mental attitude.

## It is unlikely that you will need an x-ray or scan

Scans highlight a physical structure but are often unable to explain why pain occurs. Scans often highlight normal age-related changes (e.g., disc degeneration) and findings that were there before your pain began and will still be there when your pain has gone.

A study of scans performed in people with no back pain at all reported changes in 86% of scans including 20% of twenty years olds, 40% of forty-year olds and 80% of sixty-year olds.

Therefore, it can be much more useful for the physiotherapist to listen to your concerns and complete a full assessment.

## What should I look out for?

**If you experience any of the following with your back pain you need to speak to your doctor as soon as possible.**

- Progressive weakness in your leg(s), especially if you cannot pull the foot upwards.
- If you have had a history of cancer in the past.
- If you have had a fall that caused the back pain.
- If you are taking steroid tablets or have osteoporosis.
- If you have a fever or are feeling generally unwell.
- Worsening pain with weakness, numbness or unsteadiness in the legs.
- Severe pain that does not improve with this advice leaflet after 6 weeks.

**You should attend your local Emergency Department as soon as possible if you develop any of the following with your back pain:**

- Loss of sensation when you urinate / pass a bowel motion.
- Difficulty when trying to urinate.
- Difficulty trying to stop the flow when you urinate.
- Leaking urine / Recent need to use pads.
- Not knowing when your bladder is full or empty.
- Numbness around your back passage.
- Altered feeling when you wipe yourself after the toilet.
- Loss of feeling / pins and needles in-between your thighs.
- Loss of sensation in the genitals during sexual intercourse
- Changes in the ability to ejaculate / gain an erection.

## Key Points

- 90% of the population will experience lower back pain at some stage in their lives.
- Try to remain positive, remember that 'pain does not equal damage'.
- Prolonged bed rest can make things worse.
- Your general health and back are improved with regular exercise.
- Most back pain settles within 6 weeks.
- Even when the pain is severe, serious or permanent damage is rare.

## Further Information

Watch the video 'Tame the Beast' <https://www.tamethebeast.org/#tame-the-beast>

Watch the video – 'The truth about back pain' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-cBtPSf0Hc>

Watch the video – 'How to relax – 8 relaxation tips for your mental health'  
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-tips/>

Read the information on 'The British Psychological Society:' 'Ouch! The different ways people experience pain'  
<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-24/edition-6/ouch-different-ways-people-experience-pain>

## Exercise

Start slowly and gradually move through the levels as your pain starts to reduce and your movement increases.

Pain during exercises should be manageable. Aim to stay within the green and amber zones.

If experiencing excessive pain then you can modify the exercise, and then slowly build it back up over time;

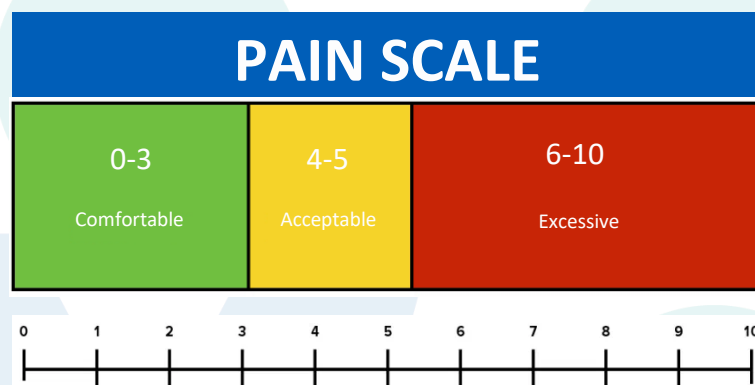
- Reduce the range of movement
- Reduce repetitions
- Reduce the resistance/weight being used
- Slower, less intensity and control the movement more
- Increase the rest between each set of exercises

Progress onto the next stage of exercise once they become easier and you can fully complete the exercises in the comfortable zone of the pain scale.

Pain after exercise should settle to your pre-exercise levels within 30-60 minutes.

Pain or stiffness the next morning should not last longer than 60 minutes.

Use your pain relief, ice/heat or anything else you have found that eases your symptoms.





**Stage 1**

**Knee Hug**



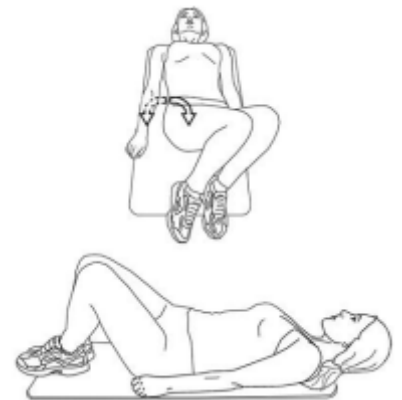
Lie down facing the ceiling. Slowly bring one knee towards your chest using your arms for support. Hold for 2-3 seconds. Slowly return to the starting position. Keep this pain free.

Repeat 10–15 times | Perform 2-3 times daily

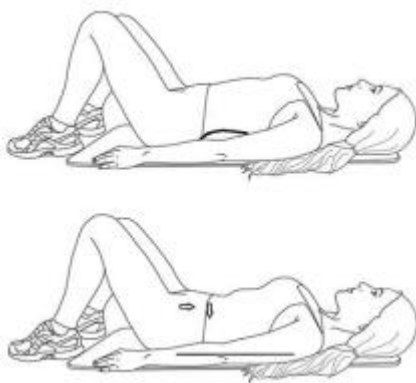
**Lumbar Rolls**

Lie down facing the ceiling. Bring your ankles to your bottom to bend your knees. Slowly roll your knees from side to side as far as you are able. Keep this pain free.

Repeat 10–15 times | Perform 2-3 times daily



**Abdominal Contractions**



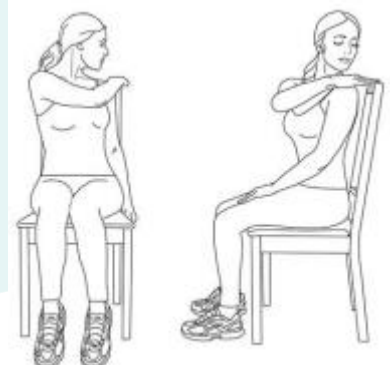
Lie on the floor with knees bent. Activate your core by drawing in your lower abdominal muscles below your belly button and squashing the spine towards the floor.

Hold for 5-10 seconds | Repeat 5 times | Perform 2-3 times daily

**Seated Rotations**

Sitting upright on a chair with good posture, slowly rotate your mid-spine side to side to look over your shoulder. Keep this pain free. This is a useful exercise to mobilise the spine and to manage acute back pain.

Repeat 10–15 times | Perform 2-3 times daily





## Stage 2



### Glute Bridge

Lie to face the ceiling with your knees bent. Keep your forearms on the floor. Feet and knees should be shoulder width apart. Squeeze your bottom muscles, and slowly raise your hips and pelvis upwards. Slowly lower back down. Try to prevent your knees from wobbling.

Hold for 10 seconds | Repeat 5 times | Perform 1 times daily

### Cat Cow

Keel on the floor with your palms flat and hands beneath the shoulders. Pull in your lower abdominal muscles and arch your back upwards. Then slowly lower your tail bone towards the ground to arch your lower back. Keep this pain free.

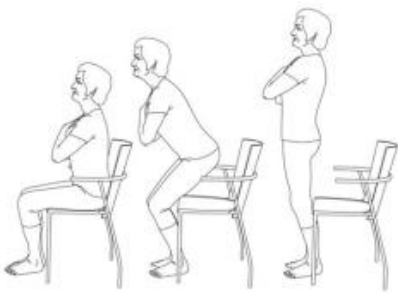
Repeat 10–15 times | Perform 2-3 times daily



### Sit to Stand

Sit upright on a chair with good posture and arms across your chest. Pull in your lower abdominals, lean forwards and slowly stand up. Once standing, slowly sit back down keeping your arms across your chest. If this is too difficult, use your arm(s) to balance yourself.

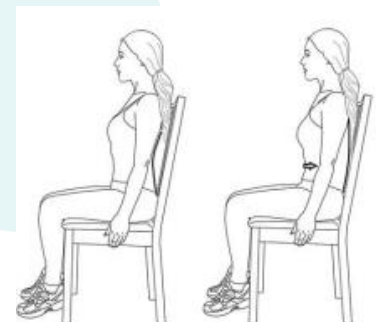
Repeat 10–15 times | Perform 2-3 times daily



### Seated Pelvic Tilt

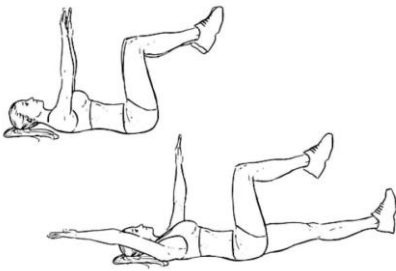
Sit upright on a chair with good posture. Slowly tilt your pelvis to flatten your spine against the chair. Then slowly tilt your pelvis in the opposite direction to arch your lower back. This is a useful exercise to mobilise spine and reduce back pain.

Repeat 10–15 times | Perform 2-3 times daily



### Stage 3

#### Dead Bug



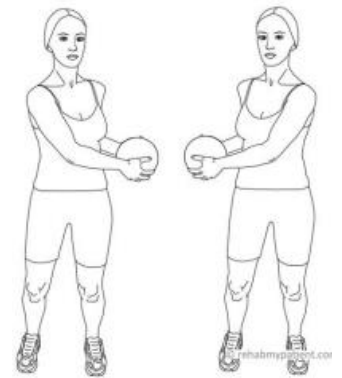
Lie flat on your back. Raise your arms and knees above your head. Activate your abdominal muscles and maintain a neutral spine. In a controlled manner, lower your foot in a bent knee position to the floor. Return to the start. Complete with the opposite side.

Repeat 10–15 times | Perform 1 times daily

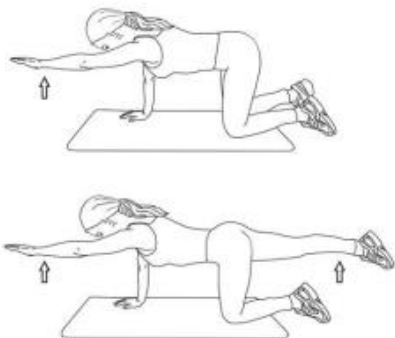
#### Ball Twist

Stand with your legs shoulder width apart, and your knees slightly bent to about 20 degrees. Draw your belly button in towards your spine and slowly rotate your body while holding a medicine ball or other suitable small weighted object.

Repeat 10–15 times | Perform 2-3 times daily



#### Bird Dog



Position yourself on all fours and draw your tummy inwards. Straighten one arm in front of you and the opposite leg behind you. Hold this for 10-15 secs.

Repeat 5-8 times | Perform 1 times daily