

Managing low back pain

Information for patients



Serious conditions are very rare

Back pain is very common. Health professionals are trained to check for back conditions that require special investigations, tests or referral to a specialist.

Most back pain is linked to minor strains, which can be very painful but will improve over a few days to weeks. Worse pain does not always mean more damage.



Use simple pain relief strategies

For most people, simple pain relief is best. Try heat wraps or heat packs, distraction techniques or relaxed breathing. Your doctor can recommend over-the-counter pain medications that may help you stay active while you are recovering.

Sometimes your doctor may prescribe stronger medicines for a short time to help you keep moving. Your doctor will check your progress so you can stop using medications as soon as possible.

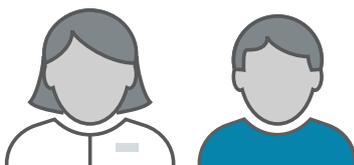


For more information or to provide feedback scan this code.



Remember that most people don't need scans

Your health professional will arrange tests if they are required. Lower back x-rays and other scans usually do not show the cause of pain. They do not change how your pain is treated and expose you to radiation. They can cause you to worry, causing the pain to stay for longer.



Follow up with your local health professional

Your local healthcare professional is best placed to manage your back pain and will help make sure that you are improving as expected and getting back to normal life.

You should follow up with your health professional within two weeks, then regularly until the pain has resolved or if you have any questions.



Keep moving – it's the best thing to do

Continue as much activity as you can, doing a bit more each day. Avoid bed rest – too much rest slows your recovery. Protecting your back too much by tensing or avoiding movement can make things worse. If you are employed, get back to work as soon as possible, even if this is part time or reduced duties. This will help you recover more quickly.



Remind yourself that most people get better with time

For most people, back pain does not mean there is a serious or long-term problem. Be confident your back will get better with time if you stay active, and follow the advice you have been given by healthcare professionals.

Doing regular exercise and losing excess weight may lower your future risk of low back pain.

Seek urgent care from your local health professional if:

- ✓ you become unable to pass urine or lose bowel control
- ✓ you notice changes in feeling in the 'saddle' region (your bottom, genitals and between your legs)
- ✓ your symptoms get a lot worse, despite treatment.

In an emergency, attend your local emergency department or call 000.

In non-emergency situations, you may contact Healthdirect for advice. This is a free 24-hour service – 1800 022 222.

Back pain recovery plan

FOR (PATIENT NAME)	DATE

HOW WILL I STAY ACTIVE?

Try not to lie or sit for a long time (unless sleeping).

Change position at least every 30 minutes when awake (e.g. sit, then walk, lie on a bed, walk again).

Try to do your normal activities as much as you can.

Set goals to do a little bit more activity or plan to walk each day. Take breaks if needed.

Start with walking for

Walking is an easy and safe way to keep moving.

Use other pain management strategies.

Heat packs, heat wraps or relaxed breathing may help you to keep up your normal activities.

Other

WHAT ELSE CAN HELP ME KEEP MOVING?

Medications can help you remain active. Your doctor may prescribe stronger medicines for the first few days. They will advise you when to stop using these, and when to follow up with your GP for a safe medication plan during recovery.

Medication name	Dosage (how much)	How often (e.g. twice daily, before activity)	When to stop

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR ME?

Which health professional should I see, and when?

Review with	Contact details

When

Contact your health professional if your condition worsens.

This document has been produced by the ACI Muskuloskeletal Network, in collaboration with the Pain Network and the Emergency Care Institute.