

BEATING BACK PAIN

This bulletin helps you to prevent or deal with back pain.

WHAT CAUSES BACK PAIN?

Most back pain is caused by strained muscles or ligaments. This can happen as a result of:

- Bad posture – standing or sitting badly
- Bad lifting technique
- Being unfit or overweight
- Stretching or using your back muscles a lot more than they are used to.

Even when you experience a lot of pain it is rarely caused by anything more serious than strained muscles or muscles in spasm.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT BACK PAIN

If you treat your back pain correctly most back pain should lessen in two to three days.

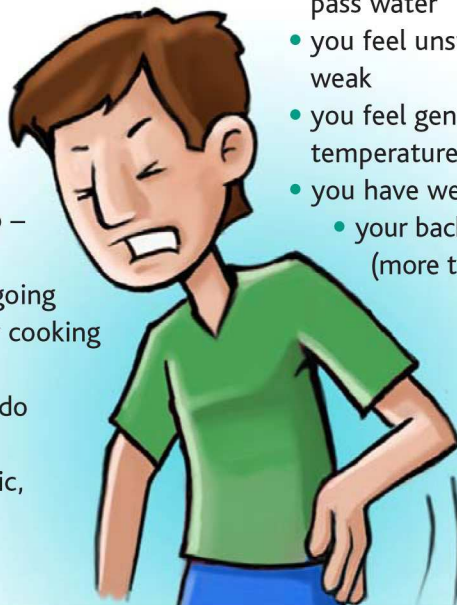
First 1-2 days

- Try not to bend forwards, strain yourself or sit in a chair for long periods of time.
- Take pain killers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen according to the instructions.
- You can apply a heat or ice pack to the area for no longer than 30 minutes at a time (wrap ice packs in a towel before applying to the skin).

More than 1-2 days

Keep active and get moving

- Begin trying to get up and about – moving around won't do your back any harm even if it hurts.
- Lying in bed for too long will not help – it may make it worse.
- Carry out your normal activities like going to work, walking the dog, shopping or cooking as best you can.
- Pace yourself and you will be able to do much more.
- Physiotherapy, osteopathy, chiropractic, pilates and massage can all help.



REDUCE YOUR RISK OF BACK PAIN

Strengthening your back muscles, certain abdominal muscles and keeping fit are all important:

Walking – start slowly on flat ground building up to longer walks and gentle slopes.

Swimming – do back or front crawl instead of breast-stroke which can strain your neck.

Cycling – is a good way of getting fit. Use an exercise bike, starting gradually and build up your stamina.

Lift things safely – bend your knees, keep the object close to your body, keep your back straight and lift by straightening your legs not your back. Reverse this for putting the object down.

WARNING SIGNS!

If you have back pain and any of the following symptoms you should go to your GP or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 (England and Wales only):

- you feel numb or have pins and needles in one or both legs or around your back passage, genital area, or inside the tops of your thighs
- you are incontinent (bladder or bowel) or are unable to pass water
- you feel unsteady on your feet or both legs feel very weak
- you feel generally unwell, such as if you have a high temperature as well as severe back pain
- you have weight loss or night sweats
 - your back pain is getting worse over a period of time (more than four weeks) for no apparent reason.

More information

BackCare, the charity for healthier backs has a helpline 020 8977 5474 or visit www.backcare.org.uk.
NHS Direct 0845 4647 (England and Wales only) www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk