

Patient information

Low back pain

Barts Health Physiotherapy Website:

www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/physiotherapy



What is low back pain?

Low back pain is a common problem that affects most people at some point in their life.

In most cases the pain isn't caused by anything serious and will usually get better over time.

What causes low back pain?

Most cases of back pain are caused by minor sprains, strains, injuries, or by pinched or irritated nerves. Back pain sometimes develops suddenly for no apparent reason.

Sometimes, back pain can be caused by a specific cause, such as:

- Disc problems – changes can occur to one of the discs in the spine. Sometimes, this can lead to it pressing on one of the nerves in the area
- Sciatica – irritation or compression of the sciatic nerve, which causes pain, numbness and tingling that travels down one leg
- Ankylosing spondylitis – a long-term condition that causes pain and stiffness where the spine meets the pelvis
- Stenosis – Where the spaces through which the spinal cord passes narrow because of wear and tear

MRI scans and x-rays are not routinely needed in the assessment and treatment of low back pain. Only if your doctor is concerned about serious damage or disease will these be ordered.

What are the symptoms?

Pain is felt in the lower part of your back. Pain can sometimes spread into the buttock area, or even down one or both of your legs. Some movements or daily tasks can make the pain worse such as:

- Bending awkwardly or for long periods
- Lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling heavy objects
- Carrying shopping
- Housework
- Driving or sitting without taking a break
- Standing for long periods

Signs of a serious problem

You should seek urgent medical help if you have back pain and:

- A high temperature (fever)
- Unexplained weight loss
- A swelling or a deformity in your back
- It's constant and doesn't ease after lying down

- Pain in your chest
- A loss of bladder or bowel control
- An inability to pass urine
- Numbness around your genitals, buttocks or back passage
- It's worse at night
- It started after an accident, such as after a car accident

What can I do to help reduce my Low Back Pain?

Most cases of back pain get better on its own and you may not need to see a doctor. If you've only had back pain for a few days or weeks, the following advice may help relieve your symptoms and speed up your recovery:

- Pacing – this involves you daily activities spreading your daily activities or exercise in to smaller, more manageable tasks. Consider taking regular breaks for example when cleaning the house.
- Remain as active as possible and try to continue with your daily activities
- Take over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen if you feel you need to
- Use hot or cold packs – can be bought from pharmacies or a bag of frozen vegetables and a hot water bottle will work just as well. Be careful not to burn your skin, use a cloth or towel to protect yourself.

Although it can be difficult to be cheerful or optimistic if you are in pain, it's important to stay positive because this can help you recover faster.

What other treatments are there?

Sometimes you may need other treatments to help reduce your Low Back Pain. This is normally if your pain is severe or does not get better with the advice in the previous section:

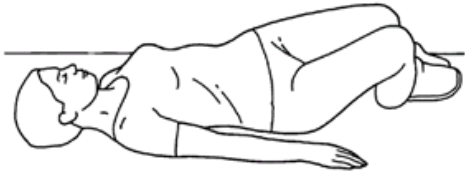
- Stronger painkillers – your GP can advise you on this
- Exercise classes – where you are taught specific exercises to strengthen your muscles and improve your posture
- Manual therapy provided by your physiotherapist, such as mobilisation and manipulation can help reduce pain and improve movement
- Counselling or 'talking therapies'
- Support and advice at a specialist pain clinic

Other treatments like Spinal Injections and Spinal surgery is only recommended when all else has failed, or a serious problem has been identified in your spine. This is very rare.

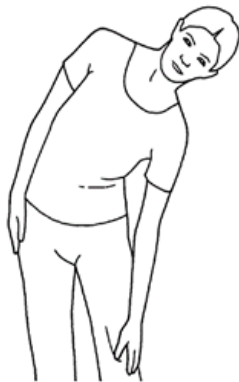
What if my symptoms do not improve?

If your pain does not improve with the exercises in this leaflet or your pain and symptoms increase, please consult your GP for further management.

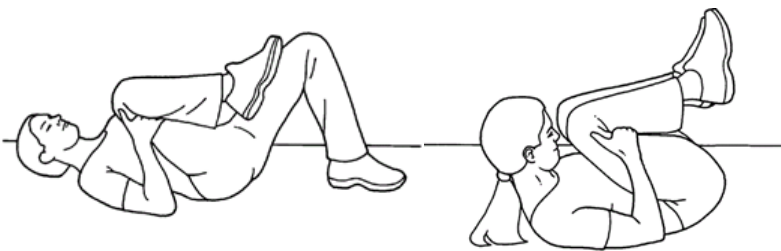
What exercises can I do to help reduce my low back pain?



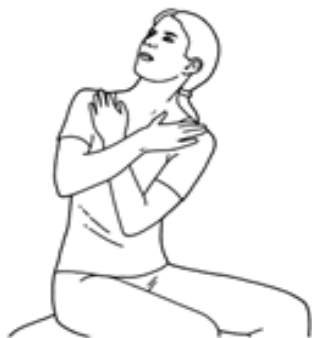
- Roll your knees slowly from side to side.
- Repeat 10 to 20 times



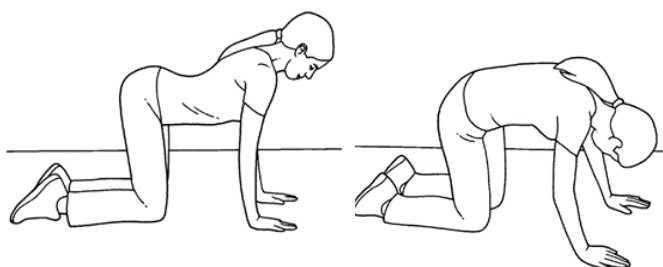
- Stretch down to the side.
- Repeat on both sides 10 to 20 times each



- Hug one or both of your legs up to your chest.
- Hold for a few seconds
- Repeat 10 to 20 times

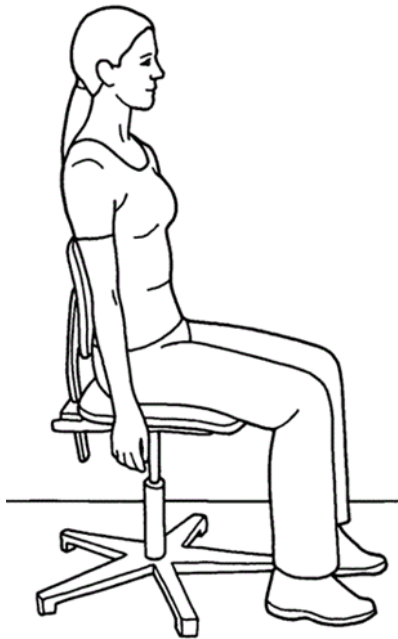


- In sitting, place your arms across your chest
- Rotate slowly to each side.
- Repeat 10 to 20 times



- In a crawling position,
- 'Hump' and 'Hollow' your back gently.
- Hold for a few seconds in each position
- Repeat 10 to 20 times

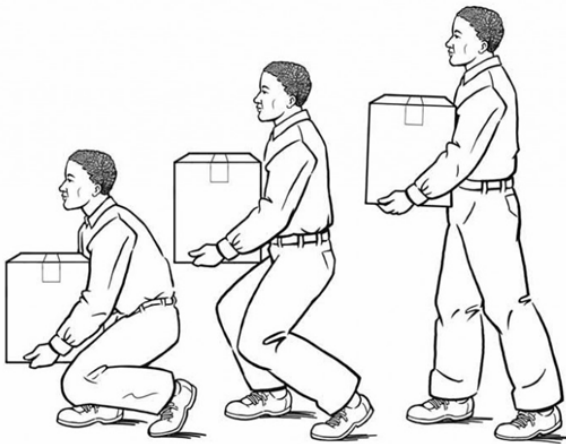
What else can I do to look after my back?



Maintain a good sitting posture, especially if you sit for long periods.

Think about:

- Having your feet on the ground
- Sitting against the back rest
- Ensuring your computer is at eye level
- Not twisting, overreaching or being too close to your workstation



When lifting objects:

- Make sure it is not too heavy
- Get close to the object
- Bend your knees
- Stagger your stance
- Face forwards

References

- 1) <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Back-pain/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- 2) Nice guidelines for the management of low back pain (2012) - <https://www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/CG88>

Contact Information for Barts Health Therapies Department

The Royal London Hospital
Telephone No: 0207 377 7872
Email: BHNT.BartsHealthTherapies@nhs.net

Mile End Hospital
Telephone No: 0207 377 7872
Email: BHNT.BartsHealthTherapies@nhs.net

Whipps Cross University Hospital
Telephone: 0208 535 6671 (Wanstead site: 0208 989 2368, Chingford site: 0208 524 3071)
Email: wxphysio.outpatients@bartshealth.nhs.uk

Newham University Hospital
Telephone No: 0207 363 8141
Email: TherapyOutpatients.Newham@bartshealth.nhs.uk

For patient information leaflets on other conditions please visit:
www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/physiotherapy

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Please contact us if you need general information or advice about Trust services.
www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/pals

Large print and other languages

For this leaflet in large print, please speak to your clinical team.
For help interpreting this leaflet in other languages, please ring 020 8223 8934.

Te informacje mogą zostać na żądanie przedstawione w formatach alternatywnych, takich jak łatwy do czytania lub duża czcionka, i w różnych językach. Prosimy o kontakt pod numerem 02082238934.

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