



**University
Hospitals Sussex**
NHS Foundation Trust

Low back pain

Accident and emergency

Patient information

Why have I been given this information?

Back pain is very common. It can cause stiffness, muscle spasms and difficulty moving around.

Most back pain gets better on its own with simple care and gentle movement. You may need painkillers to stay active while it heals. Avoid lying down for long periods. Light activity helps your recovery.

This information will help your recovery.

Common causes

Back pain can happen due to:

- Poor posture
- Lifting or bending incorrectly
- Overdoing physical activity
- Prolonged sitting or inactivity
- Stress and anxiety

How long will it take to recover?

Most back pain improves within a few days.

Staying gently active helps you get better faster and reduces the risk of ongoing pain. The body is usually very good at healing simple strains.

What treatments can I use?

Painkillers

- If your doctor has prescribed painkillers, then these should be taken at the recommended dose.

Hot or cold packs

- Gentle heat (a hot water bottle) can help reduce muscle spasm and pain. A cold pack (an ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can also provide short-term pain relief. Use whichever pack you find most helpful. Apply to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every few hours.

Relaxation

- Learning to relax your muscles can be useful if your back pain is worsened by stress and anxiety.

Massage

- Gentle soft tissue massage around the lower back may help relaxation and reduce pain.
- Simple exercises can be performed to help restore the movement in your back, preventing stiffness.
- Getting stiff muscles and joints moving is often uncomfortable to start with but becomes much easier as you regain flexibility.

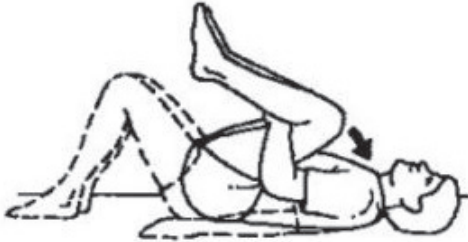
Exercises for your back

Lying on your back with your knees bent

1. Tilt your pelvis forwards and backwards.



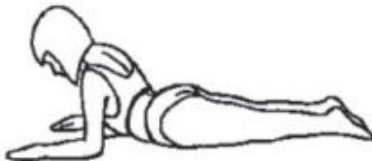
2. Bring your knees in towards your chest.



3. Gently roll your knees from side to side.



4. Lying on your front, rest on your forearms gently arching your back.



Please note

Perform each exercise gently and slowly, only moving as far as feels comfortable. Practice each exercise up to 10 times, two or three times per day. If your pain increases significantly stop the exercises and consult your GP or physiotherapist before continuing.

Do not

- ✗ Have prolonged bed rest. Your back will get stiff and muscles will get weak. You may lose fitness and feel worse in the long run.
- ✗ Rely on painkillers alone: use gentle heat, relaxation and exercise to reduce pain.
- ✗ Rest for long periods at a time as this will lead to stiffness and weakness and prolong your recovery.

Do

- ✓ Keep active. Maintain your normal daily activities, pacing them throughout the day to avoid further flare ups.

When should I go to hospital?

Urgently visit your Emergency Department if your back pain comes with with any of the following symptoms:

- Sudden or recent difficulty emptying or controlling your bladder or bowels (especially incontinence).
- Numbness around your bottom or genital area.
- New leg weakness or inability to walk.
- Shooting pain down both legs.
- Recent significant trauma affecting your back.
- Fever and chills.

If your back pain started following an injury or have ever been diagnosed with a cancer, it is important to discuss your symptoms with a doctor.

General support

- For general medical advice please use the **NHS website**, the **NHS 111** service, walk-in-centres, or your GP.
- **NHS website** www.nhs.uk/ provides online health information and guidance.
- There are walk-in and urgent treatment services at Brighton Station, Crawley Urgent Treatment Centre, Lewes Victoria Hospital, Horsham Minor Injuries Unit and Bognor Regis War Memorial Hospital.

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This article is intended for patients receiving care
in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath.

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