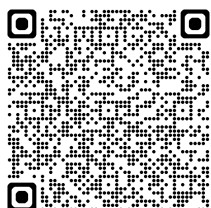


Lower Back Pain



This booklet will give you advice on managing your low back pain.



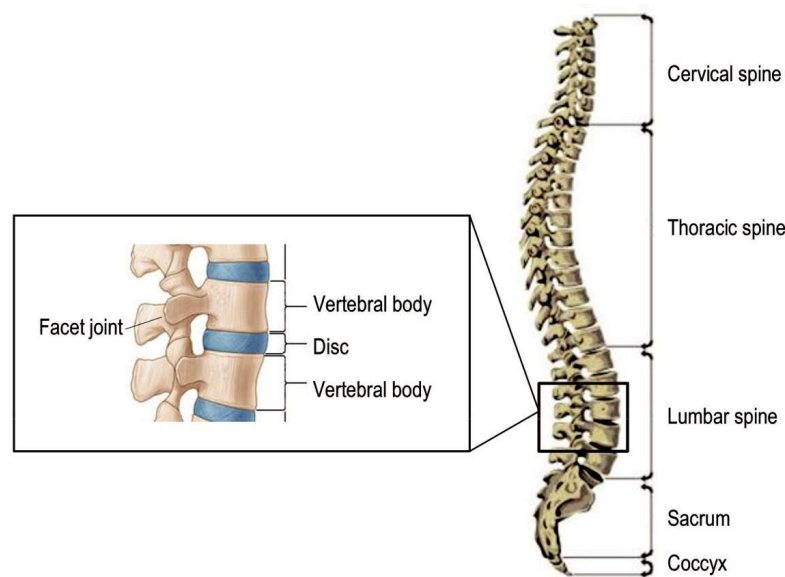
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Introduction

Low back pain can be frightening but isn't normally caused by anything serious. Most people will experience some low back pain at some point in their lives. This usually improves within a few weeks/months, although some people may experience flare ups and others may have more persistent low back pain.

A key thing to remember is that the back is a strong structure. The spine consists of bones, muscles, ligaments and discs which all work together to provide you with a strong back. The spinal column consists of 24 bones (vertebrae) and is split into the cervical, thoracic and lumbar spine.

Side view of spinal column:



The vertebrae are connected by discs, ligaments and facet joints. Your muscles and discs act as 'shock absorbers' in the spine and, along with the facet joints, help to provide the spinal column with its flexibility. You also have nerves which exit from each level of the spinal column.

Changes within the spinal column are completely normal with the ageing process, and these changes will occur at different rates in different people – much like the appearance of grey hair and wrinkles will happen at different ages in different people!

Common Myths

Myth 1: Moving will make my back pain worse!

Research has shown that resting for long periods is actually likely to make back pain worse. One of the most important things to do is to keep moving! You may need to moderate your activity levels, but you should then gradually increase this. **Moving little & often is the key!**

Myth 2: I should avoid exercise!

Studies show that **continuing regular exercise/activity can help to get you better earlier**. There is not a 'one-size fits all' approach – the most important thing is that you **enjoy** the exercise/activity! Start slowly and gradually build on this.

Myth 3: I need a scan – it will show me what's wrong!

Scans often show 'normal' changes and can cause more problems than solutions as they can make people more worried about their back. Investigations tend to only be requested if there is cause for concern (to rule out other causes) or if invasive management is being considered.

Myth 4: Pain equals damage!

Your pain often does not mean that your back is damaged. It is also important to remember that it is normal to feel aching after exercise or activity. This can take up to 48 hours to reduce.

Management

The most effective way to manage your low back pain is through exercise. The NHS currently advises that adults aged 19-64 should aim for the following levels of activity in order to stay healthy:

- 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity* or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity** or a mixture of moderate and vigorous aerobic activity each week
- Strengthening exercises on at least 2 days a week

*Moderate aerobic activity = raises your heart rate and gets you slightly out of breath

**Vigorous aerobic activity = gets you out of breath; you won't be able to say more than a few words.

Key Tips: For a Flare Up

1. Keep moving! Avoid bed rest
1. Consider manual handling techniques
2. Gradually increase activity levels
2. Find a type of exercise that you enjoy
3. Pace yourself – allow more time for tasks and do this regularly
4. Stretch little & often daily
5. Stay in work & resume normal activities standing and lying
6. Use painkillers, as advised by GP/pharmacist
7. Use hot/cold packs; whichever is comfortable move little and often
8. Try to stay positive

Key Tips: General

1. Consider manual handling techniques
2. Find a type of exercise that you enjoy and do this regularly

3. Consider your posture when sitting, standing and lying
4. Avoid prolonged static postures – move little and often
5. Complete a workstation assessment
6. Maintain a healthy weight

You can find more information regarding the general management of low back pain via the following links:

- Chartered Society of Physiotherapy: [Link to CSP website](#)
- National Institute for Health & Care Excellence: Low Back Pain Guidance: [Link to NICE website](#)
- Arthritis Research UK: [Link to Arthritis UK website](#)
- GetUBetter smart phone app: [Link to GetUBetter website](#)

If you would like some more specific advice regarding your work duties/workstation please email the Staff Physiotherapy Service and/or discuss it with your manager.

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