

Lower back pain

Information for patients

This leaflet has simple information and advice on how to manage lower back pain. If you have any queries or concerns please contact your GP.

What is lower back pain?

Back pain is really common, with most people likely to have it once in their lifetime. Though it can be painful, it is rarely serious, and for most people it settles over a short period of time.

Mechanism of injury

There are many different reasons for getting back pain. The most common cause is a simple muscle strain or increased tension. Your back consists of a column of bones, called vertebrae, which are surrounded by several strong muscles that work continuously to keep your back moving freely. There are factors that cause these muscles to work harder, resulting in increased pain and tension in the back:

- minor injuries, for example, heavy lifting activities that can cause a muscle strain
- prolonged positions, for example, sitting in the same position at your desk for a long time
- emotional stress, for example family worries or stresses at work

Symptoms

You can get back pain in one or both sides of the back, or in or around the hips and thighs. Movements can feel painful and you may feel a tightness, especially when staying in the same position for a prolonged period. Sometimes you are unable to move as much in your back as you used to and it may feel sore to touch.

Management

- Ice: a cold pack (ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can provide short-term pain relief. Apply this to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every three hours and up to four times a day, ensuring the ice is never in direct contact with the skin.
- Relaxation: increased levels of stress can cause neck and back pain. Learning to practise relaxation, meditation or mindfulness techniques may be a useful management tool to reduce stress and general wellbeing.
- Relative rest: reduce activities that are making your symptoms worse, for example, the amount of time you spend on your feet.

- **Painkillers:** pain relief can help manage the discomfort in the short term. Normally painkillers bought from a pharmacist will work. If you have any questions please speak to a pharmacist.
- **Exercise:** you should complete exercises that aim to strengthen and help the way you move in order to return to your normal activities. Please see below for suggestions of a graded exercise programme.
- **Weight management:** when you are overweight it can increase the load/pressure on your joints. By reducing your weight you may find some relief in your symptoms.

Follow-up

You do not routinely require physiotherapy for this type of injury. Most find they improve with time, general exercise and returning to normal daily activities. If your neck and back pain does not improve after 8 to 12 weeks then you may benefit from physiotherapy, we recommend you contact your GP to refer you to your local physiotherapy department.

Healing

This type of injury can take approximately 3 to 6 months to settle. This may vary from person to person.

Please follow the rehabilitation plan shown below:

| Weeks since injury | Rehabilitation plan |
|---------------------------|---|
| 0 to 2 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Begin the 'stage one exercises' at the end of this letter. ✓ Follow the management advice as per above |
| 2 to 8 weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Once your pain has begun to settle, start the exercises below labelled 'stage two exercises'. |

Initial advice

Exercise

Completing regular exercise can help improve both your physical and mental wellbeing.

Mindful movement

When completing your day-to-day activities be mindful how you are using your hips, legs and your back. You may find that you are maintaining the same position for a prolonged period of time, therefore aggravating your back.

Stress management

Take time each day for breathing exercises, mindfulness or meditation, or other relaxation techniques.

Stage one (3 to 4 times a day)

Knee hugs



Position yourself lying on your back and slowly bring your knees towards your chest. Hug your knees in, bringing them as close to your chest as possible when you begin to feel a stretch in your lower back hold the position for 5 to 10 seconds.

Slowly then relax your legs so that your knees are bent and feet flat on the floor.

Repeat this 6 to 10 times as needed.

Knee rolls:



Position yourself laying on your back and slowly bring your knees keeping your feet flat on the floor (you can either have your arms by your side or outstretched for support).

Slowly roll your knees from side to side pausing briefly at both sides, and the middle (for 3 to 5 seconds). Continue for the 45 to 60 seconds.

Childs pose stretch:



Start in four point kneel with wide knees and slowly sit back into your feet. Head down and sink your shoulders into the mat.

Take deep breaths in this position. Hold for 45 seconds.

Pelvic tilts:



Position yourself laying on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. In a neutral position you will have a slight arch in your back.

Slowly tilt your pelvis so that your lower back is touching the surface. Some of us may find this difficult, which is normal. Slowly return to your neutral position.

Complete this movement slowly in a controlled manner. Repeat 8 to 12 times and complete 2 to 3 times a day.

Stage two exercises

Once you can easily complete the above exercises without discomfort then move onto the exercises below.

Reaching toes:



Position yourself standing with your feet hip width apart. Place your hands on the front of your thighs and take a deep breath in. As you breathe out, slowly bend forwards, reaching towards your toes. Curl down from your back and let your hips follow. When you reach as far as you can, hold this position for 5 seconds. Slowly then bring yourself back into a standing position, doing so without using your hands to assist you back to standing.

Each time try to reach further down the front of your thighs. Repeat this 6 to 10 times and complete 3 times a day.

This can also be completed in a seated position your thighs wider apart so you can reach down to the floor.

Sit to stand:



Position yourself sitting in a chair with your arms across your chest and your feet flat on the floor, shoulder width apart. Slowly lean forwards and stand up without using your arms. Once in a standing position slowly sit back down to the chair in a controlled manner.

Repeat this 8 to 12 times, three times a day.

Camel cat movement:



Position yourself on your hands and knees (hands directly below your shoulders, and your knees hip width apart).

Starting in your neutral position, slowly arch your back upward as high as you can (rounding the top half of your back "camel"), and then slowly relax your back into a neutral position.



Hold each position for 3 to 5 seconds. Complete this 6 to 10 times, of which can then be completed 3 times a day.

Stage three exercises

Once you can easily complete the above exercises without discomfort then move onto the exercises below.

Squats:



Position yourself in standing with your feet hip width apart. Keep your abdominal muscles tight. Slowly, move the hips back, bending the knees and hips to lower the torso. Push your body weight into your heels. As you are lowering into the squat, raise your arms out in front of you for balance. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds. Lift back up in a controlled movement to the starting position.

Repeat 8 to 12 times, three times a day.

Keep your chest lifted and ensure your back is flat. Avoid letting your knees move forward over your toes.

Step up:



Stand facing a step.

Step up onto the step with your affected limb. Lift your other foot off the floor, then place it next to the other foot. Slowly lower your unaffected foot towards the floor then bring your affect leg/ foot down. Repeat for the opposite limb.

Repeat this 8 to 12 times, three times a day.

Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help

and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net

You can also contact us by using our online form at www.kch.nhs.uk/contact/pals

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact PALS on 020 3299 1844.