

## Exercises

Specific exercises can often help alleviate back pain as they are specific for the lumbar spine. Here are a few simple exercises that you can try to help increase your flexibility and strengthen your back. They should not be painful to do and you should try and do them 4 times a day when your back is sore. If you find that your pain increases immediately after doing the exercises then stop doing them and wait until the next day. It may help to put some heat on the area of pain 15 minutes before you exercise.

- 1 Lying on your back with knees bent and arms by your side. Tighten your stomach muscles and press the small of your back against the floor letting your bottom rise. Hold 5 secs -relax.



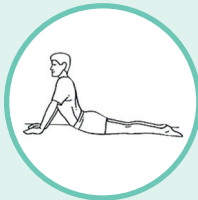
- 2 Lying on your back with knees together and bent. Slowly roll your knees from side to side keeping your upper trunk still.



- 3 Lying with your knees bent and your feet on the floor. Lift one knee towards your chest. Place your hand behind the knee and draw it into your chest. Hold 5 secs. Repeat to other side.



- 4 Lying face down with both your hands at shoulder height. Straighten your elbows and lift your upper trunk as far up as you can. Keep your pelvis and legs relaxed.



LOOKING  
AFTER  
YOUR  
BACK AT  
HOME

DOs and  
DON'Ts

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# Back pain is miserable!

It affects 1 in 8 of us at any one time, but it is important to remember that 80% of back pain settles within 8 weeks. It is often caused by everyday activities such as: gardening, DIY, housework, driving, lifting, working at your computer.

Firstly it is important to remember that our bodies are designed to move and not to be sedentary in seated or static positions. It is important to take regular exercise to maintain the mobility of the spine so that the muscles, bones and joints can generate movement.

Most back problems are the result of poor posture or sudden strain on the muscles. This can often be prevented by becoming more aware of your posture and movements.

This advice leaflet is designed to give you some useful tips, ideas and exercises that may help you manage your back pain.

## Posture

Our spine is an 'S' shape with gentle curves at the neck and the base of the spine. In order to adopt a good posture it is important to think about how you can achieve this.

### Sitting

- Try rolling up a hand towel to place at the base of your spine to help maintain the 'S' shape
- Sit right to the back of the chair with your feet firmly on the ground
- Do not sit crossed legged.



Bad sitting position

Sitting position on a chair with good back support (lumbar roll)



### Sitting

- Stand tall with your weight shared equally through both legs
- Try and scoop your tummy in as you stand tall
- Wear low supportive shoes rather than high shoes or stilettos

Adopt the third ballet position, ie. feet are aligned to turn-out, but with one foot to the front with heel close to the arch of the back foot.



### Sleeping

- Most people will benefit from having a firm base under the mattress. The mattress itself does not necessarily have to be rock hard. It should be comfortable and firm enough to support the spine when lying on your back or side
- If your bed is too firm you could try placing an duvet or eiderdown under your bottom sheet to make it a little softer or you could try a mattress topper
- You could try lying on your side/back with a pillow between your knees if your back is particularly sore at night

### Driving

- Ensure that your driving position gives support for your lower back - you may find it helpful to have the backrest tilted slightly backwards
- If your car doesn't have a lumbar support you could try rolling up a small towel and place it at the base of the spine

### Working

- Prolonged bending will cause problems. Wherever possible ensure that your work height allows you to keep your back straight
- Avoid leaning forwards when in a crouched or a seated position
- If you have to work with a bent back then stand up frequently and stretch backwards five to six times as shown by your physiotherapist before returning to your work.



# Relieving pain

You may have visited your GP and they may have prescribed some medication. Over the counter medication, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAIDs) are usually recommended to relieve back pain, but this should be discussed with the Pharmacist. Paracetamol is also a good purpose all round pain killer but is usually best taken regularly 4 times each day initially.

Applying heat or cold to the area can be a very effective way of relieving pain. Heat can be very soothing for muscular aches -warm shower/bath or applying a wheat pack, heat pad or hot water bottle. A cold pack can help reduce inflammation.

Alternatively, you can combine the two, start with heat and then apply the cold a few minutes later.

Physiotherapists occasionally recommend a TENS machine which is a neat device applied via self-adhesive pads to the back. This delivers a sensation which helps confuse the brain by blocking out the pain signals. Beware of sneezing or coughing.

Try and brace yourself in a standing position or use a towel around your waist, tighten when you sneeze or cough.

Do the activities and exercises that ease your pain -follow the advice and exercises of your physiotherapist.

