

Back Pain

Information Booklet for Patients

What is back pain?

Back pain can be caused by many different things: often in children and young people it is caused by growing bones and muscles becoming tight which can cause your back to feel painful and sometimes stiff. In almost all cases of back pain it is completely safe and also very important to keep moving as best you can. This leaflet contains some basic guidance on how to manage your back pain, the following advice and exercises should help with pain in both your mid and lower back.

What is the best treatment?

The best thing you can do for all types of back pain is to keep it gently moving and try your best not to worry about it too much. It is now known that worries can make back pain feel worse so staying positive is really important. Other things that can help your back feel better include;

- Ice or heat packs as you need them
- Trying to avoid staying in one posture for long periods of time whilst playing the computer or studying – please take regular movement breaks every 30 minutes.
- Try and keep going with normal sports and activities if they don't flare up your pain, reduce them a little if they do but try not to stop all sports and activities. The amount you need to reduce will vary from person to person.
- To manage your pain and keep your back moving it is advised that you initially take regular simple pain relief. This can be bought over the counter from a pharmacist. If you have any allergies or conditions which affect the use of pain relief or any questions or concerns please seek advice from your GP or a pharmacist.

Rehabilitation and recovery

If you follow this advice leaflet, you should notice your symptoms start to improve within 6-8 weeks. However, everyone recovers at different rates and it is dependent on the severity of the pain and discomfort, the length of time you have had back pain, and the presence of any other medical problems.

Please scan this QR code to watch the associated video to this leaflet. This will also guide you through some of the first exercises and teaches you what they should look like. The video shows some extra stretches which you might find helpful.



Initial stretching exercises

Try and start working through the following exercises as soon as you can – it is safe to start trying these exercises straight away. Try and do at least 2 of these stretches a day, and hold each movement for up to 30 seconds, breathing smoothly and deeply.

1. Back of leg stretch:

Start by lying on your back, and lifting one leg towards your chest. Place your hands behind your thighs as shown. Gently straighten the knee until you feel a stretch behind the leg (your hamstring muscle). The goal is that your top leg points straight to the ceiling – with no knee bend.



2. Back twist stretch:

Lie on your back with your arms outstretched. Lift one knee up and then cross it over your body reaching your knee towards the floor. You can gently keep it in place by holding your knee with your hand.



3. Child pose:

Start on your hands and knees, and then reach your hips back to sit on your heels. Keep reaching your arms forwards so you feel a nice stretch up your back. You can widen your knees away from each other if this is more comfortable, but try to keep your feet together.



4. Mid back stretch:

Start on your hands and knees, and reach one arm up towards the ceiling. Try and get a straight line from one hand to the other, hold a few seconds and then bring your arm down to reach up on the other side.



5. Curving back stretch:

Start on your hands and knees. First, push through your hands to arch your back up towards the ceiling, looking through your knees. Hold this for a few seconds, then return to look forwards so your back is straight and level with the floor. Alternate smoothly between each of these positions - trying to get as much movement into your back as possible.



Exercises progressions

Start these exercises as soon as the above exercises are becoming easier, and you are thinking about restarting your activities again. These exercises are all strengthening exercises so try doing these for around a minute at a time to build up your muscles. Continue with the stretches above, particularly if you are still feeling it.

1. Dead Bug:

Start by lying on your back with your knees and arms above you like the first photo. Extend one leg and the opposite arm towards the floor, hover them just above the floor, and bring them back into the starting position. Repeat the other side. Make sure your lower back remains in contact with the floor at all times by gently squeeze your belly muscles.

This is challenging, so if you need to work on first moving just each arm and then each leg so you can work on your control then please try this first.



2. Superman:

Start on your hands and knees. Reach one arm in front of you, and lengthen the opposite leg out behind you. There should be a straight line between your hand and your heel. Try and balance in this position without wobbling over. Then repeat the other side. One side will always be easier than the other.



3. Leg bridge:

Start by lying on your back with both knees bent. Squeeze your buttocks together and tilt your hip bones towards the ceiling. Continue to curve your spine off the floor so you lift your bottom up and push your hips high – like the second photo. Ensure there is a straight line between your shoulder and your knees, and hold for a few seconds. Return to starting position and repeat. Aim to do at least 20 bridges in one go. If this gets easy, then you can move onto more challenging bridges: lifting up each leg in turn at the top, or starting with one leg up so you are only pushing through one leg.



Return to sports and activity

If you feel as though you are able to, you do not have to wait for the go ahead from a health professional to return to your normal activities. As your back continues to feel better you can gradually return to your usual activities like sports and PE. This often has to be a flexible process as some days your knee may feel better than others.

- Always try and pace your return: restart one activity or training session a week
- Remember to always warm up and cool down
- Keep going with your stretches
- Inform your coaches that you may need to adapt the activity for a wee while whilst you get back to your normal. They should be able to help you.

Managing Physical Activity Levels

Managing the amount of high intensity exercise you participate in each week will allow your body to properly recover. Remember, after holidays and injuries remember to build back up to normal levels of activity slowly.

A useful guide is to limit high-intensity activity to no more than 4 sessions per week and to try not to participate in high-intensity activities on 2 consecutive days. By planning recovery days you are allowing your body to get stronger, adapt and repair. Getting high quality sleep is also a key factor in this.

Try to limit your total number of hours of structured sports per week to no greater than your age.

Below is a useful table for you to manage what you are asking your body to do;

Training	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
PE							
School activities							
Out of school activities							

When should I seek further assessment or advice?

If you do have any concerns, ongoing pain or are struggling to return to your normal activities please call the physiotherapy department to speak with one of our physios and make a self referral.

There are a few situations in which your child's back pain may require further investigation or assessment;

- If they are under 10 years old.
- If they feel unwell and/or have a high temperature or unexplained weight loss.
- If their pain is getting progressively worse.
- If they have pins and needles, numbness or weakness in their legs.
- If they start developing or complaining of stiffness or difficulty in moving.
- If they have pain at night.
- If they develop changes to their bladder and bowel habits.
- If their back pain does not start to improve within 6 weeks of starting the exercises and advice in this leaflet.

Further advice

If you have followed all of the advice above and you have not noticed any improvement in your symptoms within 6 weeks, you can contact the physiotherapy department on details below.

Physiotherapy Team
Therapies Department,
Royal Hospital for Children and Young People,
50 Little France Crescent
Edinburgh
EH16 4SA

Telephone 0131 312 1079