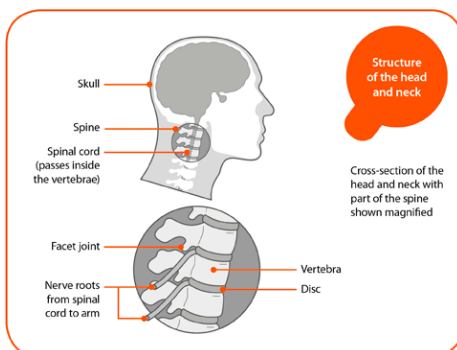
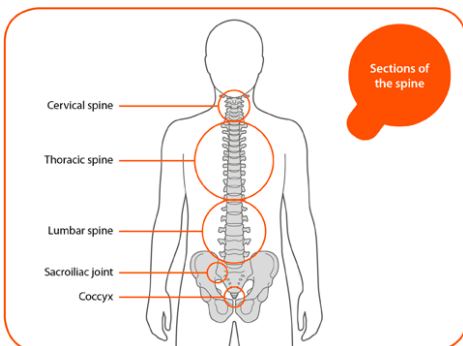


Back Pain



How does the back work?

The back is a complicated structure built around the bones of the spinal column. The spinal column consists of 24 bones (vertebrae) sitting one on top of one another. It sits on the pelvis and is topped by the skull. The bones of the spine are connected by discs at the front and facet joints at the back. The discs help to absorb loads on the spine and, with the facet joints, give the spinal column its flexibility.



What causes back pain?

Sprains and strains

Back pain isn't usually a sign of a serious medical condition – it's much more likely that an awkward movement has pulled a muscle or sprained a ligament. Simple cases often improve within 6-8 weeks. Staying active and getting on with normal activities is one of the best ways to deal with back pain, but you can take pain killers if you need to. It's very important to exercise the affected muscle to improve its strength, although you should rest the muscle if it's in spasm. If pain is stopping you from doing what you want to do, physio treatment can help to improve things.

Sciatica

Back pain is sometimes linked with pains in the leg, often called sciatica. It affects the sciatic nerve that runs from the spine to the leg. The pain is felt anywhere from the buttock to the big toe. Other symptoms include numbness and tingling in the legs and feet. Sciatica is caused by an irritation of the sciatic nerve – there's nothing wrong with the leg itself.

You should seek medical attention right away if you:

- have numbness or tingling around your bottom or genitals
- have sudden difficulty passing urine
- lose control of your bowels
- are unsteady when you walk, your legs feel weak or your foot is dropping or dragging

These may be signs that the nerves at the bottom of your spine are being pressed on. This is called **cauda equina** syndrome and needs urgent treatment

Diagnosis of back pain

Your physiotherapist or GP will usually be able to diagnose your lower back pain from your symptoms and a physical examination. There's often no need for further tests. But if you have other symptoms, your GP may recommend some further tests. These might include:

- an X-ray
- an MRI
- blood tests

Back Pain Myth Busters



We're busting myths and reinforcing what the latest evidence says is best for your back



Myth:

Moving will make my back pain worse

Fact:

Don't fear twisting and bending – it's essential to keep moving. Gradually increase how much you do and stay on the go!

Myth:

A scan will show me exactly what's wrong

Fact:

Sometimes it will, but most often it won't. Even people without back pain have changes in their spine so scans can cause fear that influences behaviour

Myth:

I should avoid exercise, especially weights

Fact:

Back pain shouldn't stop you enjoying exercise. In fact, studies found continuing with exercise can help you get better sooner! Including using weights where appropriate

Myth:

Pain equals damage

Fact:

This was the established view, but more recent research has changed our thinking. Modern physio takes a holistic approach that people understand why they are in pain



What can you do for simple back ache?

Medication

Painkillers like Paracetamol and Ibuprofen may help, and you should use them if you need to. Take them regularly and at the recommended dose to help you control the pain and allow you to continue moving normally. Don't wait until your pain is severe before taking painkillers. You shouldn't take Ibuprofen or Aspirin if you are pregnant, have asthma, indigestion or an ulcer. If you are unsure, speak to your doctor. Medication can have side-effects, so you should read the label carefully and check with your GP or pharmacist if you have any queries.

Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy can help you to manage pain and improve your strength and flexibility. A physiotherapist can provide a variety of treatments, help you understand your problem further and get you back to your normal activities. They can also give you advice on how you can prevent symptoms returning in the future

Usually, back pain will go away after 2-6 weeks. However, if you have long term pain that is severe and isn't improving over time, you may wish to see your GP or a Physiotherapist.

Keep moving!

Stay active and continue your daily activities as normally as you can. However, remember to take care when lifting or twisting your back. Doctors used to advise bed rest, but now we know it can make back pain worse. Try to avoid sitting for long periods. If you have a desk based job, try to take breaks little and often and be aware of your posture.

Hot/Cold

To help manage your pain, you may want to try applying heat or cold treatments to your back. Remember not to apply ice directly to your skin.

Self-help exercises for back pain

Exercise is the best way that you can:

- ⦿ Ease stiffness and pain
- ⦿ Build up muscle strength and stamina
- ⦿ Improve your flexibility and general fitness.

If your back pain lasts a long time, lack of movement can cause the muscles to become weak. This makes it more likely that you'll strain them in future. It's important you don't rest for too long and keep moving. A physio will be able to recommend the best exercises for you to do to help your back.

Give these a go at home!

Hip twist stretch

- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Keeping your knees together, lower them to the ground as far as you can on one side and maintain the stretch.
- Return to the neutral position and repeat the other side
- Do not raise your shoulders off the floor when you lower your knees



Pelvic tilt

- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Activate your lower abdominals by bringing your belly button inward and by activating your pelvic floor muscle slightly
- Maintain a steady abdominal breathing while tilting your pelvis and flattening your back to the ground
- Return to neutral and repeat



Knee to chest

- Lie on your back
- Lift one leg up towards your chest and maintain the stretch
- Return your leg back down
- Repeat on the other side



Four-point kneeling exercise

- Kneel on all fours with your chin tucked in, your knees directly under your hips and your hands directly under your shoulders.
- Lift one leg up and back, without arching the lower back.
- Lower the leg and repeat with the opposite leg.
- Maintain a neutral spine position throughout



Prayer stretch

- Get on your hands and knees (four-point position) with your knees directly under your hips and your hands directly over your shoulders.
- Your back must be in a neutral position (slightly arched) and your chin must be tucked in.
- Sit backward towards your heels by lowering your buttocks.
- Maintain the stretch and return to the initial position.



Looking for more information? ↓

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