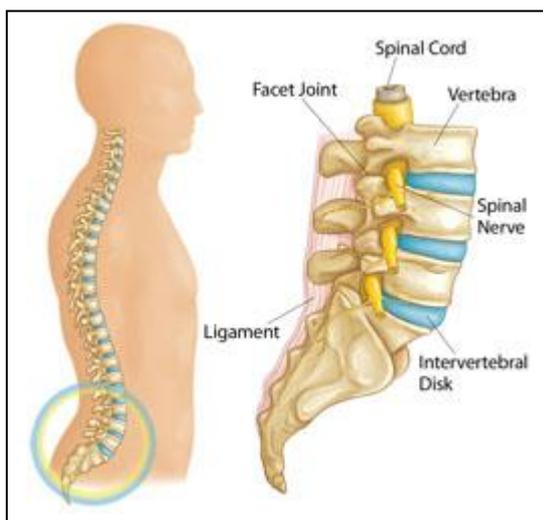


Self Management of Low Back Pain

Here are some facts about backs:

- Back pain is very common. The acute pain usually improves within a few days or weeks but sometimes aches and pains can last for quite a long time.
- Most back pain is not due to serious disease but the exact cause can be difficult to find.
- Xray and MRI can detect serious spinal conditions but they don't usually help with simple back pain and they may be misleading.
- Very few back problems ever need surgery. Only a few people with back pain have slipped discs or trapped nerves. Even then it usually gets better on its own with time and self management.
- A proportion of people who get backache will get it again within a couple of years but most people return to normal activity between episodes.



What causes back pain?

- Your spine is strong. It is made up of a series of solid bony blocks joined by discs and held together by strong ligaments and muscles.
- Most simple back sprains do not cause lasting damage. The problem is usually that the working parts of your back (muscles, ligaments and small joints) are not working well and moving properly.
- Doctors and therapists sometimes mention “degeneration”, this is not damage but the normal changes with age – like grey hair!

How can I manage my back pain?

- Your back is designed for movement, the sooner you **get moving** and back to ordinary activities, the sooner you will feel better.
- Those people who cope best with back pain are those who **stay active** and get on with life despite the pain.
- If you have to **rest** find a position of comfort, lie on your back with a pillow behind your knees, on your side with a pillow between your knees or on your front with a pillow under your tummy.
- **Pace yourself** – limit or modify your activity for a time if needed.
- Anything that causes a lot of pain should be avoided but some discomfort may have to be accepted when trying to do normal activities

- Try not to sit for more than 20-30 minutes without getting up and moving around.
Avoid slouching. Try some support in your lower back.
- Use **painkillers** if you need them. Over the counter painkillers are often effective and should be taken regularly at the recommended dose. If in doubt talk to your Pharmacist or GP.
- **Heat and cold** can be used for short term pain relief and to relax muscle spasm eg, a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel, a hot water bottle applied for 20 minutes or bath or shower.
- Try the **gentle exercises** attached to keep your back moving.
- Treatments from a qualified professional (eg Physiotherapist, Osteopath, Chiropractor) may help. However you shouldn't need treatment for months on end and you should be given advice on self management and shown ways to keep your joints moving and muscles strong.
- **Stay at work if you can.** If you do have to stay off work, it helps to get back as soon as possible. Temporary modification of your job or work hours may help.
- If you are overweight you should try to reduce your weight to reduce stress on your back and help prevent recurrence.

Warnings Signs

These symptoms are very rare but if you do have back pain and develop any of these you should see your doctor straight away.

- Difficulty passing or controlling urine.
- Numbness around your back passage or genitals.
- Numbness, pins and needles or weakness in both legs.
- Unsteady on your feet.
- Severe pain which is getting worse over several weeks instead of better or if you are unwell with back pain.
- Recent unexplained weight loss.