

Back pain, with leg pain



A guide for patients

Most back pain, with leg pain, settles with time.

Often the leg pain feels worse than the back pain.

There is a lot you can do to help yourself.

Serious or permanent damage is rare.

At first, you may need to rest more, or change how you do things.

What are the facts?

- Most back pain, with leg pain, settles with time. Acute pain improves in few days or weeks
- Often the leg pain feels worse than the back pain
- Pain can last for a long time, or may come and go
- Back pain is rarely due to serious disease or damage. Even minor back strains can be very painful

Do I need an x-ray or a scan?

No, it is very unlikely that you will need these. They may be misleading when words like 'degeneration' are used. Degeneration is normal with age – just like wrinkles or grey hair. Tests will be arranged only if necessary



Should I take pain-killers or anti-inflammatories?

Yes, you should take medication regularly, as prescribed. Your GP (or a pharmacist), can advise you which medication may be best for you. Early medication can help your recovery.

Should I use heat or cold?



Yes, a heat pad, or cold pack, can help give you relief for a while. Leave it on for up to 10-15 minutes.

Test which one works better for you.

If you use a cold pack, remember to put a damp tea towel around it to protect your skin.

You will have good and bad days – that's normal.

Try to stop yourself from over-doing-it on a "good day"

– this can help speed up your recovery

Should I keep moving? Should I rest?

- ✓ Keeping moving helps you recover.
- ✓ Staying active keeps your joints mobile and your muscles strong.
- ✓ The spine is very strong.
- ✓ Try to stay active, but respect the pain in your leg.
- ✓ You may need to reduce your activities and rest more if your pain is very severe.
- ✓ Experiment with different resting positions – try to find a position that reduces your leg pain
- ☒ Bed rest is not a treatment. It can make your back and legs weaker. You should be up-and-about by two weeks at the latest, even if you still have some pain. Contact your doctor if you cannot manage this.
- ☒ If you rest too much, your back will quickly get out of condition. Try to get up for short periods.
- ☒ Don't try to beat the pain in your leg by keeping doing something that makes it worse. Change your position, and change activity – see if that helps.

What can I do to help my back and leg?

- ✓ Experiment with different resting positions – try to find a position that reduces your leg pain.
- ✓ You may lie down if the pain is severe. Try to get up for short periods and gradually increase the time you are up for.
- ✓ Gentle walking and swimming (vary the strokes). Build up slowly.
- ✓ If you do have to limit some of your activities, try to build them back into your life over a few days or weeks.
- ✓ Consider the things that make your pain worse. Think about the postures that make your pain better. Use this knowledge to help control your pain.

What else can I do to help my pain?

- Stress and tension can make your pain feel worse

- It is natural to worry about your back. This worry can cause more tension in your back. This leads to more pain
- Remember, hurt does not mean harm or damage.

Try to do something that helps you relax.

For example, imagine something calm; listen to music.

Try this exercise to help back tension and pain.



Find a comfortable position.

Focus on your breathing.

Slow and steady breathing.

“Let go” of tension as you breathe out.

This can take 10-15 minutes.

Do I need to see my doctor?

- Not usually if you follow advice and take the right medication
- Back pain usually improves over the first 6 weeks

If you experience any of the following, speak to your GP as soon as possible:

1. Generally feeling unwell
2. Back pain that starts when you're ill with other problems- such as rheumatoid arthritis or cancer.
3. Unsteadiness when you walk.

Is my back pain something serious?

Contact NHS 24 on 111 URGENTLY if you develop any of the following:

- Sudden or new difficulty passing or controlling urine
- Numbness or altered feeling around your back passage or genitals: such as wiping after the toilet
- Pins and needles around your back passage or genitals: such as wiping after the toilet

Urgent surgery may be needed if you lose bladder or bowel control or the use of your legs but this is extremely rare

The content of this leaflet is provided for general information only. No representations or warranties are made (express or implied). If you have or suspect you have a health problem you should consult a qualified health professional.

This leaflet was compiled by Edinburgh Community Physiotherapy Service in conjunction with the Patient Information Leaflet Group, NHS Lothian Physiotherapy Services
 Ref: Lothian. Physiotherapy. Back Pain (with leg pain) (general advice) March 2015

Back Exercises



A guide for patients

Stay Active

Keeping active is an essential part of your treatment and recovery. It is the single best thing you can do for your health. Little and often is often a good way to start.

This leaflet gives you some exercises to help keep your back moving normally

Your back might cause you problems due to a sudden injury or it may have been sore for a long time.

Not moving your back can make your problem worse. This is because your back is likely to get stiffer and more painful if you do not try to move it.

The exercises should not cause severe pain. The more you do them the easier they will get.

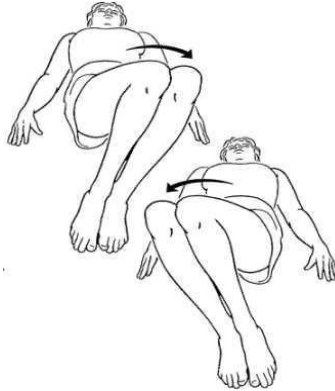
If your pain becomes worse over time, stop and speak to your physiotherapist or GP.

Only do the exercises your physiotherapist has marked for you

1. Rotation in lying

Lie on your back. Bend your knees and keep your feet on the floor. Relax. Move both knees over to the side. This twists the body. Return to the middle.

Right Left



Repeat ____ times.

2. Low back flexion

Sit with your legs apart. Bend forwards. Put your head between your knees. Return to upright.

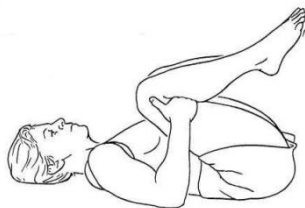
Repeat ____ times.



3. Lie on your back

Lift knees to chest. Use your arms to hug them closer. Return to flat.

Repeat ____ times.



4. Kneeling stretch

Bend forwards and stretch your arms out in front. Keep your bottom on your feet. Repeat ____ times.



5. Low back extension

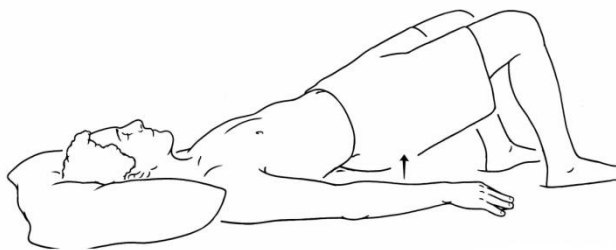
Stand with your back to a table. Place your hands flat on the table. Bend your hips forward away from the table. Return to upright.



Repeat ____ times.

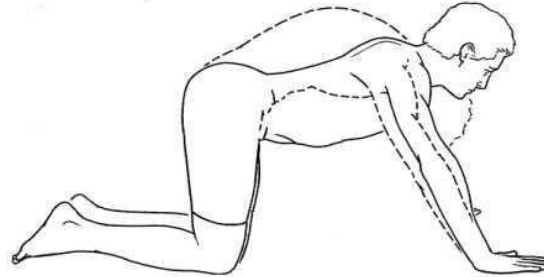
6. Bridging

Lie on back, with knees bent and feet on the floor. Relax. Gently, pull in your deep stomach muscles. Tip your pelvis backwards so your low back touches the floor. Slowly lift your bottom off the floor. Each back bone lifts, in turn, off the floor. Hold for ____ seconds. Slowly lower back down. Touch each back bone down in order again. Repeat ____ times.



7. Angry cat

Kneel on all fours. Tense your bottom and tuck in your bottom and pelvis. Arch your back like a cat. Then tip your pelvis the other way so your back hollows and sags down.

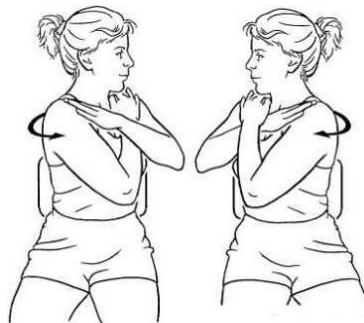


Repeat ____ times.

8. Rotation in sitting

Sit up tall. Fold your arms in front of you at shoulder level. Turn to the side and return to the front. As you begin to warm up you may be able to go faster.

Right Left



Repeat ____ times.

Acknowledgements © VHI Tools

This leaflet was compiled by RIE in association with the Patient Information Leaflet Group, NHS Lothian Physiotherapy Services.

This leaflet should only be used by specific individuals following physiotherapy assessment. If you have any concerns please approach your physiotherapist.

Ref: Lothian.Back Exercise.March.2014

Back Matters

Advice for Lower Back Pain

8 Top Tips for a Healthy Back:

- 1 Keep Active:** Avoid bedrest. Keeping active is important even if you have to move slowly at first and gradually build it up. 
- 2 Stay at Work/ Hobbies:** or return to them as soon as possible. Research shows the people who continue to work during an episode of back pain recover more quickly than people who stay at home. 
- 3 Pain Management:** Your pharmacist can advise you on medication. 
- 4 Smoking:** Smokers have slower recovery rates and are at higher risk of recurrent sciatica than non-smokers. 
- 5 Healthy Weight:** Being overweight increases your risk of developing low back pain. 
- 6 A Good Night's Sleep:** Poor sleep can make us more stressed, cause a headache, make us feel tired or down, similarly it can also cause or prolong back pain. Improving sleeping routine and habits can be very helpful in reducing pain. 
- 7 Stay Positive:** The vast majority of back pain will get better. Having a positive attitude and keeping up your normal daily activities, despite your pain, can help your recovery. 
- 8 Don't rush for investigations:** MRI and X-ray's are rarely helpful in diagnosing the cause of back pain. Tests can be arranged by your healthcare professional if necessary. 

Further Information:

For more information on how to reduce pain and staying healthy can be found on the **NHS Inform** website. Additionally you can download the **NHS 24 MSK self-help App**.



Download the self-help App



Check the website
nhsinform.scot

Further Information

For reliable, trustworthy advice and information you can trust visit NHS inform
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/>

or the NHS 24 APP

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/tools-and-apps/nhs-24-msk-help-app>

What is sciatica: a short video explaining about back pain with leg pain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJvNBYOKf64&feature=youtu.be>

10 Things you need to know about back pain: useful advice and information on back pain produced by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

<https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/10-things-you-need-know-about-your-back>

Information on different types of physical activity and its benefits.

www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living.

NHS Fitness Studio: contains lots of free to access exercise videos

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio>

(To open a link just right click the link and click 'open hyperlink').