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University Health Board

## Back Pain Advice Sheet

Acute low back pain is a common problem and for the majority of people it improves over a few days or weeks. Rarely is there a serious cause to low back pain. The most important things to do are described below.

<b>Things you should do</b>	<b>Things you should not do</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use ice packs (frozen peas wrapped in a towel will do), for 15-20 minutes every 2-3 hours if you can. You could also try heat packs – again be careful and do not use hot water bottles/heat directly on your skin as they can burn</li><li>• Use a small firm cushion between the knees when sleeping on the side, or several firm pillows propping the knees up when lying on the back, may ease symptoms.</li><li>• Gradually increase your normal activities and do regular exercise.</li><li>• Take regular pain relief</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not rest for too long as keeping active and mobile has been shown to be more effective.</li><li>• Use ice packs<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• over areas of skin that are in poor condition</li><li>• if you have poor sensation to cold</li><li>• If you know you have poor circulation.</li></ul></li></ul>

Staying physically active is likely to be helpful as exercise helps to stretch tight muscles and joints and stops the working parts seizing up. Take regular pain relief – this can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Follow the instructions on the packet/bottle.

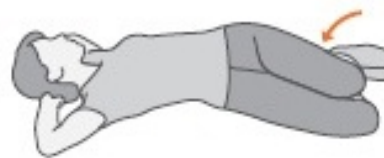
Try doing the exercises below often during the day. Start slowly doing a few at a time. They may cause discomfort but this should not be severe or last very long, and should reduce and become easier the more you do. If the pain gets progressively worse, see your GP.

## Knee rolling



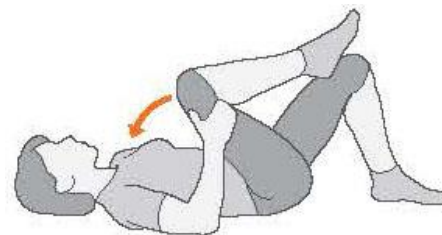
Keeping your shoulder on the floor bend your knees and roll them slowly to one side, keeping your feet on the floor. Hold for 10 seconds.

Then slowly roll both knees over to the other side. Hold for 10 seconds.



## Alternate leg hugs

Lying on your back with your knees bent, bring one knee up and pull it gently into your chest. Hold for 5 seconds then gently lower. Repeat this with the other knee. Repeat up to 5 times on each side.



## Back extensions

Lie on your front, with your hands palm down and level with your ears.

Push up on your arms to straighten your elbows and arch your back as far as you can manage. (Do not try to get all the way up straight away- if it is very uncomfortable, you can start off by just propping on your elbows.)

Keep your hips down. Relax and let your back sag.

Hold this position for a few seconds then gently lower.



## Back bends

Stand with your hands at the base of your back.

Let your hips relax forward and lean back slowly over your hands.

Do not forget to keep your knees straight.

## What do I take for pain?

No pain relief may be needed if the pain is mild. However painkillers, such as **Paracetamol**, are useful to ease pain, but it is best to take them regularly for a few days or so rather than every now and then.

They can be bought over the counter from a pharmacy or local shops. Make sure you do not take any other product containing Paracetamol.

If Paracetamol does not help at all despite taking the recommended dose then try changing to Ibuprofen 400 mg three times a day. You can also take both drugs – speak to a pharmacist about the best way to do this. If you have been advised not to take Ibuprofen in the past or are on any blood thinning tablets then avoid Ibuprofen.

**With all medication it is essential that you follow the instructions on the packet or bottle carefully.**

**Anti-inflammatory painkillers** can also be used. These relieve pain and may also limit inflammation and swelling, however if you are pregnant or trying to get pregnant you should not use them.

Side effects sometimes occur with anti-inflammatory painkillers - stomach pain and bleeding from the stomach, are the most serious. Some people with asthma, high blood pressure, kidney failure or heart failure may not be able to take them either.

You can buy Ibuprofen at pharmacies both in tablet and gel form. There is less risk of side-effects with the gel, however, the amount of the drug that gets into the bloodstream is much less than with tablets and it is important that you use enough gel.

## How long might my symptoms last?

Your pain should ease within 2 weeks and you should recover over approximately a 4–6 week period. You should carry on with the exercises for at least 6–8 weeks to help prevent another injury.

Top tips for management of Low Back pain	You should not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lift correctly. Put one foot in front of the other and keep your back straight. Bend down with your hips and knees and straighten them to get back up again. Hold the object you are lifting close to you.</li> <li>• Stand correctly, tucking in your bottom and tummy.</li> <li>• Sleep on a bed with a firm base. Get out of bed by rolling onto your side. Then bend your knees and swing both legs out of bed as you push yourself up on your elbow.</li> <li>• Sit with enough support for your back and thighs</li> <li>• Relax. Pain makes you tense which causes more pain. If you try to relax, the tension gets less and so does the pain.</li> <li>• Heat such as a hot bath may help to ease pain</li> <li>• Check for everyday things that may be making your back worse. This might include stress, uncomfortable and/or repetitive postures at work, at home or while driving, or long periods of sitting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stoop. Try to make sure that worktops are at the same height as your hip when you are standing.</li> <li>• Be overweight. If you are, try to go swimming regularly as it is a good form of exercise.</li> <li>• Stay away from work because you have pain – Returning to work helps to relieve pain by getting back to a normal pattern of activity and providing a distraction from pain.</li> </ul>

It is important that you contact an Emergency Department immediately if you develop any of the following problems (Red flags):



Weakness of your legs



Lack of feeling (numbness) in your legs



Lack of feeling (numbness) around your back passage/bottom



Incontinence of urine (passing urine without your knowledge)



Incontinence of faeces/poo (passing faeces/poo without your knowledge)



Loss of bladder sensation (not feeling your bladder is getting so full that you need to pass urine and then dribbling urine)



Problem with erection (sexual activity)



Unwell (fever, vomiting, chills, sweating)

**If you have any doubts about your problems, especially with regards to these Red Flags, please contact your local Emergency Department. If you, are concerned about your progress, or if you have not improved within 10 days we advise you to contact your GP or return to the Emergency Department/MIU department where you were seen.**

**If you are at all concerned about your injury please contact the relevant Emergency Department/Minor Injury Unit (MIU):**

**Royal Gwent Hospital: 01633 234056**

**Nevill Hall Hospital: 01873 732073**

**Ysbyty Ystrad Fawr (YYF) 01443 802353 or 802349**

**Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan (YAB) MIU: 01495 363318**

## **References**

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/lower-back-pain-exercises/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/>

<https://www.csp.org.uk/public-patient/rehabilitation-exercises/back-pain>

<https://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/exercises-to-manage-pain/back-pain-exercises.aspx>

**“This document is available in Welsh /  
Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.**