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## Information for Patients

# Low Back Pain

## Physiotherapy Service

This leaflet explains what **low back pain** is and gives advice on what to do about it. 'Simple', 'muscular' or a more current term, 'non-specific low back pain' are all terms used to describe the very common back pain that most of us experience at some point in our lives.

### Where is it felt?

Common symptoms include pain, stiffness, and muscle spasms. These can be felt between the **bottom of the rib cage and the lower back** and buttocks area.

### How could it affect me?

The symptoms are commonly felt more by movements such as:

- Bending
- Walking
- Sitting
- Standing



Low back pain can affect our ability to carry out daily activities, including work and hobbies.

At times the pain can feel severe and for some be ongoing. This can affect our general well-being and mental health.

### Why does it happen?

Low back pain problems can start because of an incident or increased physical demand (for example lifting). It can also start for no obvious reason.

Factors that may increase the risk of ongoing low back pain include previous back pain, obesity, smoking, educational status, stress, anxiety, depression, work issues and whole-body vibration jobs. It can affect any of us at any age, but tends to be more common from our 30's to our 60's. Those who have had low back pain before are more likely to have it again.

**The severity and impact of symptoms are often due to a combination of:**

- How we are made (muscles, joints and nerves)
- What we think (thoughts and feelings)
- How fit and healthy we are
- How we move
- What activities we do
- How we do our activities

### **Is it serious?**

Based on the information you have provided, your physiotherapist believes you have non-specific low back pain that is **not** a medical concern.

Back pain can sometimes be a sign of other medical conditions. Investigations are sometimes needed to rule out other problems but are not needed to confirm non-specific low back pain. In most cases x-rays are not advised and scans are only useful in a small number of people with back pain with other signs and symptoms.

If you are not improving or getting worse despite following the advice given, please contact us again.

### **Will it get better?**

**For most people symptoms will ease in the first 2 to 6 weeks** for a new onset of back pain or a flare-up of longstanding low back pain. It can take some people longer to get back to normal and some describe ongoing problems.

It is important to understand that to recover as best as we can we must build back up our physical and mental health. This can reduce the chance that we will have longstanding back problems.

### **What can I do to help myself?**

Continue to carry out the self-help advice on **managing your pain, modifying your activities** and gradually **building up your physical and mental health**. Introduce the further advice and exercises you receive from your physiotherapist. Exercises cause your body to adapt to activity. It's a gradual process. For them to work you will need to stick with them.

Consider the factors affecting your situation and work towards improving them.

- Learn more about low back pain
- Consider other pain medication options with a Pharmacist or GP

- Improve physical fitness through activity and exercise (see your exercise sheet)
- Improve your lifestyle (weight, smoking, alcohol, activity, stress)
- Improve your mental health and well-being

### **What can be done to help me?**

Further physiotherapy assessment and treatment may be necessary if the advice provided does not help. You can discuss this further with the physiotherapist. Being actively involved in your health and well-being is still the most important part of rehabilitation.

**There is a good chance that you will improve if you follow the advice you have been given. If you are not improving despite following the advice, please contact us again for further support.**

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