

# Back Exercises

## Service User Information Leaflet

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Produced by Fife Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service



## Introduction

Back pain is very common, affecting approximately 80% of the population at some point in their lives. The information here is based on the latest studies. Always remember that there is a lot you can do to help yourself.

### Remember:

- Back pain or back ache is not usually due to any serious damage.
- Most back pain settles quickly.
- It can be very painful. You may need to reduce some of your activities for a couple of days. Resting longer than this does not help, it is important to keep moving.
- Your back is built to move. The sooner you get back to normal activities, the sooner your back will start to feel better.
- People who are fitter generally get less back pain. People who are fitter generally recover better if they do get it. Think what you could do to improve your own fitness when this episode settles.

### In the early stages:

- Full bed rest is not recommended. It is better to stay active if you can.
- If you have to go to bed, try to start moving again after 2 days. Gradually increase your activity day by day. This can cause you some discomfort for a short time. This is normal and it is important to keep trying.
- Take any medicines given by your doctor regularly. Don't wait until the pain becomes out of control before you take them.
- Use heat such as a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel or a cold bag of frozen peas wrapped in a wet towel to give short term relief. This is in addition to your medication.
- Do **not** stay in one position for longer than 20 to 30 minutes. It is important to keep moving around. Prolonged sitting, especially in a low soft armchair can make the pain worse.

## Exercises for the back

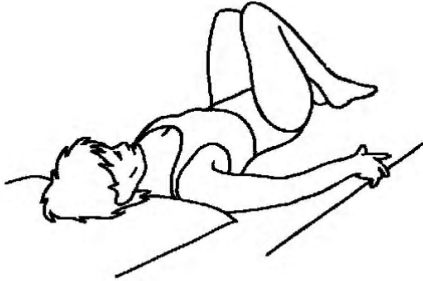
The aim of these exercises is to help you move normally and safely.

### How many times and how often?

- Start with 5 to 10 repetitions of each exercise.
- Add one or two repetitions more every few days or as pain allows.
- Try to exercise about 3 times a day.
- Be guided by your pain.

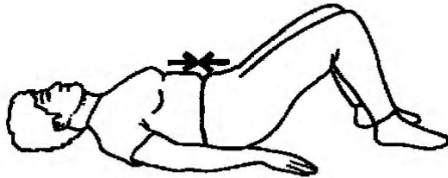
**Stop these exercises if you feel they are:**

- Making your symptoms steadily worse over time. They may be slightly uncomfortable at first.
- Bringing on new pain.



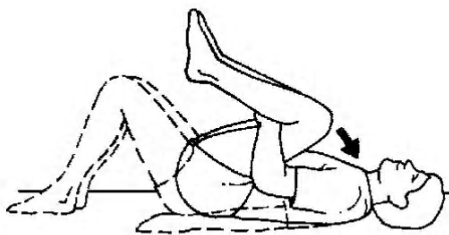
Lying on your back with knees together and bent.

Slowly roll your knees from side to side keeping your upper body still.



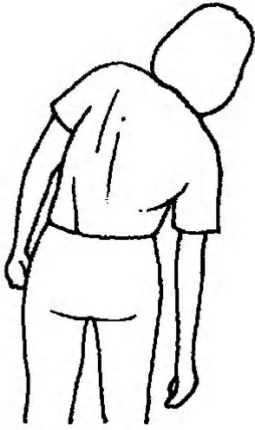
Lying on your back with knees bent and arms by your side.

Tighten your stomach muscles and press the small of your back against the floor letting your bottom rise. Hold for 5 seconds and then relax.



Lying with your knees bent and feet on the floor. Lift your knees towards your chest.

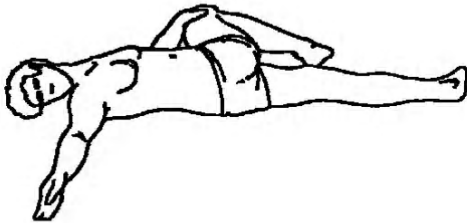
Place your hands behind both knees and draw them towards your chest. Hold for 5 seconds and then return your feet to the floor.



Standing.

Bend sideways at the waist.

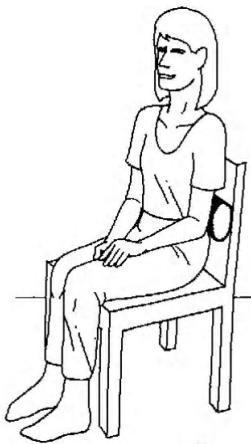
Repeat 3 times to each side



Lying on your back with one leg bent.

Bring your bent knee over the other leg and push your knee against the floor with the opposite hand. Then reach with the other arm to the opposite side looking in the same direction. You will feel the stretching in your lower back and bottom. Hold approx. 20 seconds and then back.

Repeat 3 times to each side.

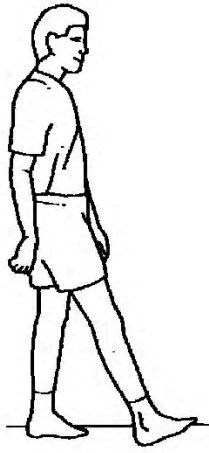


Sit with a support

Don't sit for longer than 20-30 minutes



Sitting with poor support



Take a brisk walk daily, increasing the distance gradually as able

### What can I do to help myself?

- If you are taking painkillers or anti-inflammatories, take them regularly, as prescribed. You may want to speak to a pharmacist or your GP to get advice about which medication is best for you.
- Don't wait for the pain to get out of control.
- You may need to rest if the pain is very severe. Try to move about a little, as the pain allows.
- If you are resting, try to find a position that eases your leg pain.
- Bed rest is not a treatment, but you may have to lie down if the pain is severe.
- Try to get up for short periods as soon as your pain allows and gradually increase the time you are up for. You should be up and about by two weeks at the latest, even if you still have some pain. If you cannot manage this then you should consult your doctor. Don't try to beat any leg pain if present by continuing with an activity which makes it worse. Instead, change position for a period of time and see if that helps.
- Gradually increase your activity level, as you feel able. Slowly start to introduce normal activities, aiming to do a little more as the weeks pass.
- Gentle walking and or exercises in water are good activities to start with.

Here are a few positions that people find comfortable when their back is really sore.



## Warning Signs

If you have severe pain which is getting worse over several weeks, or if you are unwell with back pain, you should consult your doctor. The following symptoms are very rare, but if you suddenly develop any of them, you should consult a doctor straightaway.

- Difficulty passing or controlling urine.
- Numbness around your back passage or genitals.
- Numbness, pins and needles, or weakness in both legs.
- Unsteadiness on your feet.

## Cauda Equina Syndrome Warning Signs

Many patients have a combination of back pain, leg pain, leg numbness and weakness. These symptoms can be distressing, but do not necessarily require emergency medical attention.

**A rare, but serious back condition, Cauda Equina Syndrome, can lead to permanent damage or disability and will need to be seen by an Emergency Specialist Spinal Team. Some warning signs of Cauda Equina Syndrome are as follows:**

- Loss of feeling/pins and needles between your inner thighs or genitals
- Numbness in or around your back passage or buttocks
- Altered feeling when using toilet paper to wipe yourself
- Increasing difficulty when you try to urinate
- Increasing difficulty when you try to stop or control your flow of urine
- Loss of sensation when you pass urine
- Leaking urine or recent need to use pads
- Not knowing when your bladder is either full or empty
- Inability to stop a bowel movement or leaking
- Loss of sensation when you pass a bowel motion
- Change in ability to achieve an erection or ejaculate
- Loss of sensation in genitals during sexual intercourse

**Any one or combination of these seek medical help immediately**

## Useful Information

For free and confidential advice about work call the Healthy Working Lives Advice line on 0800 019 2211.

Physical Activity Advice

[www.healthscotland.com/physical-activity.aspx](http://www.healthscotland.com/physical-activity.aspx)

Physical Activity Health Benefits

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUaInS6HIGo>

Back Pain Overview

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOjTegn9RuY>