

Patient information factsheet

How to prevent back pain

We have given you this factsheet because you have recently experienced back pain. It includes a list of simple guidelines to follow to help prevent further back pain. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of your healthcare team.

Avoid lifting particularly heavy objects (where possible)

Lift correctly

Place your feet shoulder width apart. Keep your back straight. Bend your hips and knees, keeping your arms and the object you are lifting close to your body. Lift by straightening your legs.

Stand correctly

Good posture is important to prevent back strain. You should stand upright, tucking in your bottom and abdomen.

Work at the correct height

Try to avoid stooping. Your work surface should be level with your hip when standing.

Sleep on a bed that has a firm base

Get out of bed correctly

Roll onto your side, bend your knees, swing both of your legs together over the edge of the bed and push up on your elbow.

Sit correctly

Your back and thighs should be well supported.

Exercise regularly

It is important to keep fit and continue your exercises, as these will strengthen your back and abdominal muscles, and keep your spine from getting stiff. Swimming is one of the best forms of exercise.

Try to move around often, even if you have limited mobility and need to spend a lot of time sitting. It's important to change position regularly if you can.

Learn to relax

Pain causes tension, which increases pain. Relaxation reduces tension, which reduces pain. Practising relaxation techniques regularly can help to reduce persistent pain. There are many types of relaxation techniques, varying from breathing exercises to types of meditation. The links at the bottom of this sheet contain some useful information about coping with back pain. You can also ask your GP for advice.

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When to return to the emergency department

You must return to the emergency department for an assessment immediately if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- being unable to pass urine
- feeling that you are unable to completely empty your bladder
- new loss of bladder or bowel control (wetting yourself or soiling yourself)
- new pain or weakness in one or both of your legs
- 'pins and needles' or a numb feeling in your genitals or bottom
- sexual dysfunction (for example, being unable to maintain an erection)
- pain that is so bad that it wakes you up at night

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain

www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/10-ways-to-ease-pain

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