

Physiotherapy Department

Back care - Advice and exercises

There are several structures within the back that can become injured and cause back pain, for example disc, joints, muscles and ligaments. Many episodes of low back pain or injuries to the back will resolve within a few weeks by following the advice below.

1 MANAGEMENT OF ACUTE BACK PAIN

a) Heat - use a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel over the painful area to relieve pain. (Make sure it is not so hot it will burn you.)

b) Ice - This is often more effective than heat at reducing pain, inflammation and muscle spasm, especially with pain of recent onset. Wrap ice cubes or a bag of frozen peas in a damp towel and place over the painful area for 10 – 15 minutes, at 2 to 3 hourly intervals. Check skin to ensure no ice burns have occurred.

c) Pain relief – Keeping your pain under control is important to your recovery - it will help you to keep moving gently. See your GP or pharmacist for advice regarding pain relief.

d) Resting positions

- lie on your back with one or more pillows under your knees



- lie on your stomach – try putting one or more pillows under your stomach **or** under your chest, depending on what feels more comfortable



e) It is important to avoid sitting or staying in the same position for long periods of time. Keeping moving regularly will help to prevent stiffness and prolonged pain. You may need to adapt your normal activities for a little while, but aim to return to work as soon as possible. If you need advice regarding return to work please speak to your GP or Physiotherapist.

2 EXERCISES

General Points

- aim to perform the exercises twice daily
- begin by doing each exercise 5 times, gradually increasing each one to 15
- all exercises should be performed gently and slowly
- **only perform exercises to the start of your pain – never force yourself through severe pain. Stop them if the exercises increase your symptoms.**

To improve flexibility

a) Starting position: Lying on back (on bed or floor) with knees bent and together, and feet flat. Keeping hips and shoulders touching floor, pull in stomach and press the small of your back down onto floor. Hold for a few seconds and relax.



b) Rock knees gently from right to left. Your shoulders should remain still. You may find one direction is more comfortable than the other.



NB prolonged bed rest is not advisable – more benefit will be obtained from gentle exercise

c) Bring one knee to your chest, using your hands to pull up as high as is comfortable.

When this is easy, progress to using both knees together. Try to hold the position for 10-15 seconds to allow soft tissues to stretch.



d) Starting position: On hands and knees, keeping shoulders, hips and knees at right Angles. Hollow your back and look up at the ceiling. Round your back and look at your knees.



e) Starting position: Standing with feet slightly apart, Bend sideways slowly – do not bounce at the end of the movement. Repeat to the right and left.



To Improve Tone of Postural Muscles:

During these exercises you should feel the muscles working gently – if you are straining, the exercises are being done with too much effort. Hold each exercise for 10 seconds.

a) Starting position: Lying on front. Tighten your bottom muscles.



b) Starting position: On hands and knees, keeping shoulders, hips and knees at right angles – keep your back flat all through this exercise. Gently pull your belly button up towards your spine. Do not hold your breath.



Most episodes of low back pain get better within 2-6 weeks.

If your symptoms persist, significantly worsen, develop pins & needles and/or numbness, or you develop changes to your bladder & bowel function please seek urgent medical advice.

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