

Back Pain

How to Stop Annoying Back Pain,
Keep You Moving and Enjoying the
Activities You Love



Back Pain

Back pain is a complex condition, often with no specific cause and can be divided into acute pain which comes and goes relatively quickly and chronic, persistent pain which has a debilitating effect on everyday life.

Unfortunately, there is no single cure for back pain which can make it hard for patients to fully understand their condition, but the good news is that our backs benefit hugely from small changes we can make that will improve mobility, strength and wellbeing.

All about Backs

The spine is one of the most complex and strongest parts of the body, giving us strength and support alongside huge flexibility, which allows us to move in all the ways we need to in our busy lives.

Any pain is a signal that all is not well and back pain is no different, but it does not mean there is any serious harm to your spine. The spine is made up of bones sitting on top of each other with discs in between surrounded by ligaments and muscles. When we suffer from back pain something within this complex structure has probably become strained.

In the medical profession, it is usual for back pain to be separated into lower back pain and upper to middle back pain, with lower being by far the most common cause of everyday back pain. Indeed, back pain is so common that it is thought 4 out of 5 of us can suffer from back pain at some point in our lives and should resolve within a few weeks.

Pain that radiates out from the back down into the legs is not necessarily serious, but will require an assessment from a qualified professional to establish how affected the nerve structures are that exit from the spine.

Please remember that any change to the control of your bladder or bowel function or numbness in your groin could be more serious and you need to present to your local emergency department.

A message from Clare

"I have treated lots of patients over the years and have seen just how back pain can be prolonged and affect people's lives, slowly losing mobility and their enjoyment from life. I am passionate that there are things we can do to prevent or manage back pain without always resorting to drugs and surgery in the first instance. In our clinics we give patients lots of hints, tips and suggestions for improving back health and treating unresolving back pain. I thought it would be useful to share them so that more of you can benefit from some straightforward, no-nonsense advice which really does work."

Here are some of the hints and tips I have shared with my patients over the years - I hope they help you too. If you just implement one of these strategies each week I am sure in time they will work for you and you'll feel healthier for doing so. If you feel you need more advice then please contact us to discuss your concerns: a simple conversation with a therapist at Back in Motion will help set you in the right direction.



Tips to improve your symptoms



✓ Keep Moving

By far the most important factor in reducing back pain is exercise. Movement is vital for a healthy lifestyle and keeping fit, but if you suffer from back pain it can be easy to resist exercise. Indeed, years ago, advice centred around lots of rest but now we know that this is very damaging for backs as muscles can seize up and become weakened. Current advice is to keep moving, however slowly, and to do exercise that helps mobility and develops core strength.

Try to move a little more each day as avoiding activity can lead to deterioration in the muscle strength over time. This is very important as we naturally age and lose strength. Walking is a great form of simple exercise which we can incorporate easily into our daily lives.

Other forms of exercise to try are swimming, yoga or Clinical Pilates: your Back in Motion therapist can devise a supervised programme of exercise for you which will not adversely affect your existing back pain and will encourage developing strength and increased comfort and mobility.



✓ Footwear: it's all about the shoes

The shoes we wear have a huge impact not only on our backs, but our feet, hips and knees which can be adversely affected by the wrong type of shoes. Wearing the wrong kind of shoes can cause discomfort and long-term use can have a serious impact on our joints.

High heels are enemy number one for our backs as they distort our knees and hips and eventually our spines and can have an adverse effect on our posture and movement. Heels do not absorb 'shock' when we hit a hard surface and it is this that puts our backs under stress.

Try to avoid high heels completely, but if you do wear them, limit the time and don't walk any distance while wearing them.

Patients often assume that flat shoes are good for walking and comfort but very flat shoes like ballerina pumps, flip-flops or fashion plimsolls lack any support and cushioning which also puts unnecessary strain on our knees, hips and backs.

Always look for shoes or trainers that offer support and cushioning to lessen the impact of 'shock' or place a shock absorbing insole into your current suitable footwear- there are lots of brands available now that specialise in fashionable but comfortable shoes. You will be amazed at the difference a good pair of shoes can make to your wellbeing.



✓ Posture

The way we stand and sit is an important element in maintaining healthy joints and there are some simple techniques you can use every day to ensure comfort and wellbeing.

Are you sitting comfortably? In today's sedentary society, it is more important than ever that we learn how to sit correctly and if we remember a few simple rules we can limit back pain caused by sitting incorrectly.

Sitting down for considerable amounts of time is not good for your back, so think about how much time you spend in this position and try to incorporate frequent movement to break up the day. When you sit there is approximately 10x more pressure on your spine than when you stand tall. If you do have to sit for work, avoid slouching and make sure you sit with your legs outstretched in front of you and avoid sitting in a cross-legged position. Your therapist can show you how best to sit to avoid placing strain on your back.

Posture is vital for moving well and your therapist can examine your posture and offer expert advice to enable you to enjoy optimum joint health through improvements to your posture.



✓ Learn to lift correctly

We all need to lift heavy items from time to time but many cases of acute back pain can be avoided by learning to lift things correctly.

Always bend your knees as you adopt a lifting position and allow movement up through the spine. Don't twist your back while holding anything heavy. Try to keep your heavy object close to your chest which will minimise sudden strain.



✓ Keep healthy at work

Back pain at work is a very common problem and at Back in Motion we offer consultancy to many workplaces regarding occupational physiotherapy.

In your own workplace make use of guidance on sitting correctly at computer screens and make sure you have a specially designed office chair or workstation to minimise work-related back problems.



✓ Sleep well

People always ask about their mattress and what type to sleep on, but as everyone is so individual this is a tricky question to answer. Always change your mattress every 5 years, definitely no more than 7 years and ensure you buy from a retailer who will allow you to return the mattress if you find you don't get on with it (providing you keep the plastic on of course for the first few nights). Consider sleeping with a pillow between the legs to keep the spine straight when lying on your side, or under the knees if pain is acute as finding a good position when in pain is challenging.



✓ Keep a healthy weight

As we gain weight, we increase the impact and stress on our joints, so it is really sensible to keep an eye on your weight and eat a healthy diet. Speak to our wellness experts to discuss achieving a healthy weight if you feel you need some good advice. More movement and less weight can reduce the amount and severity of back pain we suffer. It's difficult to achieve this alone, so ensure you have support from someone to keep you motivated when the going gets tough.

✓ Get to know your therapist and Get Physical

If you are suffering from back pain or have a medical condition like sciatica or arthritis, now is the time to seek help from a professional who can help you manage your pain and move towards pain-free movement.

Visiting a hands-on specialist means you're going to get very fast access to care that will soothe and relax tight aching muscles, loosen stiff, stuck, painful joints and strengthen the body so you can get back to doing the things you love.

Our Back in Motion therapists use a variety of effective approaches that can limit the use of drugs and help you to avoid surgery whenever possible. It is a relationship worth building to enjoy an active life now and ensure a healthier future.

Note: NHS Physiotherapy departments do not provide you with the hands-on methods of treatment that you need to end back pain quickly and effectively. Disappointing, but unfortunately true. Back in Motion would love to help you to end your back pain fast.

Bonus Tips

1. Core Strength and Control in Your Back and Pelvis

Don't forget the strength of the back dictates the force on your knees when you walk and run. You or your therapist may need to give some time to incorporating exercises for your back too, especially if you have a history of spinal pain.

2. Avoid carrying Bag on One Shoulder

This is one of the most common mistakes which leads to uneven pressure on the spine, pelvis and knees. Make sure you change how you carry a bag or use a rucksack style bag.

3. Regular Pilates

Number one for keeping moving and healthy into later life in my book: all joints get a workout to help keep them supple, moving through full ranges of motion and challenging your postural strength and tone of your body. A good all round exercise to keep problems away!

4. Stay Hydrated

Feeling tired all the time and lacking energy could be the result of poor hydration. Cut down on the drinks that create de-hydration such as coffee, tea, alcohol and energy drinks. Dehydration can cause muscle aches and pains, fatigue and dizziness. Drink small amounts of water little and often throughout the day.

5. Stretch and move every day

If you are in the 40 plus age bracket your body will not cope with the forces of daily life like it used to. You need to work harder to maintain your movement and health. A little stretching or movement regime daily will help your body to maintain its flexibility and movement. It's vital to do something to reverse the effects of ageing or at least slow it down!

If you would like more information on any of the hints and tips found here, and think that Back in Motion could help you to better back health and overall wellbeing please call us or pop into one of our local clinics across Norfolk.

Our team of highly qualified therapists have helped so many people over the years to feel better and move better and we would love to do the same for you.



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Health advice Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure we accurately portray any injury throughout this guide and all examples are based on representations of those witnessed as practitioners in our clinics. Therefore, such representations are general in nature and do not correspond to any individual's potential injury. A variety of factors will cause a wide variation in recovery and therefore it is impossible to be 100 per cent accurate in prognosis and diagnosis without a physical examination and likewise the advice given for management of an injury cannot be deemed fully accurate in the absence of this examination at one of the Back in Motion Clinics. We are able to offer this service at a standard charge. Significant injury risk is possible if you do not follow due diligence and seek suitable professional advice about your injury. No guarantees of specific results are expressly made or implied in this report.

