

PATIENT  
INFORMATION  
LEAFLET

## Mechanical Lower Back Pain

Airedale NHS Foundation Trust  
Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
Bradford District and Craven Clinical Commissioning Group

### Introduction

#### Here are some facts about backs

- Back pain is very common.
- The acute pain usually improves within a few days or weeks.
- Sometimes aches and pains can last for quite a long time.
- Most back pain is not due to serious disease.
- MRI is not usually required and is usually misleading in simple mechanical back Pain.
- Very few back problems ever need surgery or injections.
- Back pain usually gets better on its own with time and self-management
- A proportion of people who get backache will get it again within a couple of years but most people return to normal activity between episodes.
- X-rays are rarely useful in diagnosing back pain, and don't help to guide treatment, either from your GP or physiotherapist. Most x-rays will show normal, age related changes, which are not a cause for pain

## Causes of Mechanical Lower Back Pain

- Your spine is strong. It is made up of a series of solid bony blocks joined by discs and held together by strong ligaments and muscles.
- Most simple back sprains do not cause lasting damage" The problem is usually that the working parts of your back (muscles, ligaments and small joints) are not working well and moving properly"
- Doctors and therapists sometimes mention "degeneration"; this is not damage but the normal age-related changes.

## Self Management of Mechanical Lower Back Pain

- Your back is designed for movement, the sooner you get moving and back to ordinary activities, the sooner you will feel better.
- Those people who cope best with back pain are those who stay active and get on with life despite the pain.
- If you have to rest find a position of comfort, lie on your back with a pillow behind your knees, on your side with a pillow between your knees.
- Pace yourself - limit or modify your activity for a time if needed. Anything that causes a lot of pain should be avoided but some discomfort may have to be accepted when trying to do normal activities.
- Try not to sit for more than 20-30 minutes without getting up and moving around.

- Avoid slouching (try some support in your lower back).
- Use painkillers if you need them. Over the counter painkillers are often effective and should be taken regularly at the recommended dose. If in doubt talk to your Pharmacist or GP.
- Heat and cold can be used for short term pain relief and to relax muscle spasm e.g., a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel, a hot water bottle applied for 20 minutes or bath or shower.
- Treatments from a qualified professional (Physiotherapist, Osteopath) may help.
- However, you shouldn't need treatment for months on end and you should be given advice on self - management and shown ways to keep your joints moving and muscles strong.
- Stay at work if you can. Temporary modification of your job or work hours may help. If you are overweight you should try to reduce your weight to reduce stress on your back and help prevent recurrence.

## Low Back Pain Warning Signs

These symptoms are very rare but if you do have back pain and develop any of these you should see your doctor straight away.

- Difficulty passing or controlling urine.
- Numbness around your back passage or genitals.
- Numbness, pins and needles or weakness in both legs. e Unsteady on your feet.
- Severe pain which is getting worse over several weeks instead of better or if you are unwell with back pain.
- Recent unexplained weight loss.

## Exercises for Mechanical Lower Back Pain

### Exercise 1: Pelvic tilts



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- Put your hands on your hips. Slowly roll your pelvis - tilt your tailbone - upward and close the space between your low back and the floor.
- You'll feel a gentle stretch of your low back.
- Return to the original position.

### Exercise 2: Knee rolls



- Lie on your back. Keep your knees bent and together.
- Keep your upper body relaxed. Roll your knees to one side, keeping both shoulders on the floor.
- Hold the stretch in your back/hip and return to the starting position.

### Exercise 3: Supine Knee Hug



- Lie on your back and lift your knees up towards your chest.
- Hold your knees with your arms.
- Next, lift your head up towards your knees.
- Hold this position and repeat.

#### Exercise 4: Standing Side Bend Stretch



- Start in a standing position.
- Next, bend your trunk to the side as you slide your hand down the side of your legs.
- Do not bend forward or back.
- Repeat to the other side.
- Keep your muscles relaxed during the movement.

#### Exercise 5: Cat and Cow



- Start on your hands and knees with your wrists directly under your shoulders, and your knees directly under your hips.
- Begin by moving into Cow Pose: Inhale as you drop your belly towards the mat.
- Next, move into Cat Pose: As you exhale, draw your belly to your spine and round your back toward the ceiling.
- The pose should look like a cat stretching its back. Inhale, coming back into Cow Pose, and then exhale as you return to Cat Pose.