

HEALTHY BACKS

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Back pain is a very common condition; about 8 out of 10 adults will suffer with back pain at some point in their life. However, there are lots of ways of coping with back pain and preventing flare ups

Back Facts

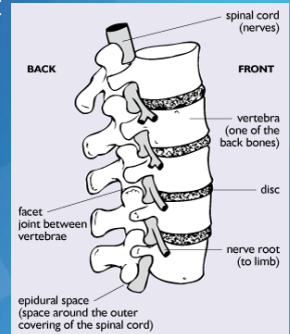
- Back pain or ache is usually not due to any serious disease.
- Most back pain settles quickly, at least enough to get on with your normal life
- About half the people who get backache will have it again within a couple of years. But that still does not mean that it is serious. Between attacks most people return to normal activities with few, if any, symptoms.
- It can be very painful and you may need to reduce some activities for a time. But rest for more than a day or two usually does not help and may do more harm than good. So keep moving
- Your back is designed for movement. The sooner you get back to normal activity the sooner your back will feel better
- The people who cope best are those who stay active and get on with their life despite the pain

There are lots of things you can do to help yourself

Causes of Back Pain

Your spine is one of the strongest parts of your body. It is made of solid bony blocks joined by discs and facet joints to give it strength and flexibility

- It is reinforced by strong ligaments
- It is surrounded by large and powerful muscles which protect it
- Your back is designed for strength and movement.
- It is surprisingly difficult to damage your spine



People often have it wrong about back pain. In fact:

- Most people with back pain or backache do not have any damage in their spine. Very few people with backache have a slipped disc or a trapped nerve. Even then a slipped disc usually gets better by itself.
- Most back pain comes from **stiffness** of the muscles, ligaments and joints in your back. They are simply not moving and working as they should. You can think of your back as 'out of condition'. So what you need to do is get your back working properly again.
- Most x-ray findings in your back are normal changes with age. You might hear things like 'disc space narrowing' or 'degenerative changes' which is sometimes called 'spondylitis'. This is usually just normal age related changes – just like grey hair.

Back pain is not usually due to anything serious



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•Stress can increase the amount of pain you feel. Tension can cause muscle spasm and the muscles themselves can become painful.
•People who are physically fit generally get less back pain, and recover faster if they do get it. So the answer to backache is to get your back moving and working properly again. Get back into condition and physically fit.

Exercise is good for you

Use it or
lose it !

Exercising regularly can not only help to reduce symptoms of back pain, but also help prevent flare ups of back pain in the future.

Regular exercise:

- Gives you stronger bones
- Develops fit active muscles
- Keeps you supple
- Makes you fit
- Makes you feel good
- Releases natural chemicals which reduce pain

You can break the Vicious
Circle of Pain and Stiffness !!

Even when your back is sore, you can make a start without putting too much stress on your back:

- Walking
- Exercise bike
- Swimming

No one pretends exercising is easy. Pain killers and other treatments can help to control the pain to let you get started. It often does hurt at first, but one thing is sure: the longer you put off exercise the harder and more painful it will be. Athletes know that when they start training, their muscles can ache. That does not mean that they are doing any damage. The same applies to you and your back. When you start to exercise you may need to build up gradually over a few days or weeks. You should then exercise regularly and keep it up — fitness takes time.

Work

Having back pain does not always mean you need to stay off work. The faster you get back to normal activities and back to work the better, even if you still have some pain and some restrictions. You may need to speak to your employer to see if you could modify your activities to allow you to return to work quicker.

Dealing with an acute attack

Occasional flare ups of back pain are normal and usually due to doing more activities than you are used too (gardening, heavy lifting) or being more inactive than you are used to (sitting or driving for long periods)

What you do depends on how bad your back feels. Remember, your back isn't badly damaged. You can usually:

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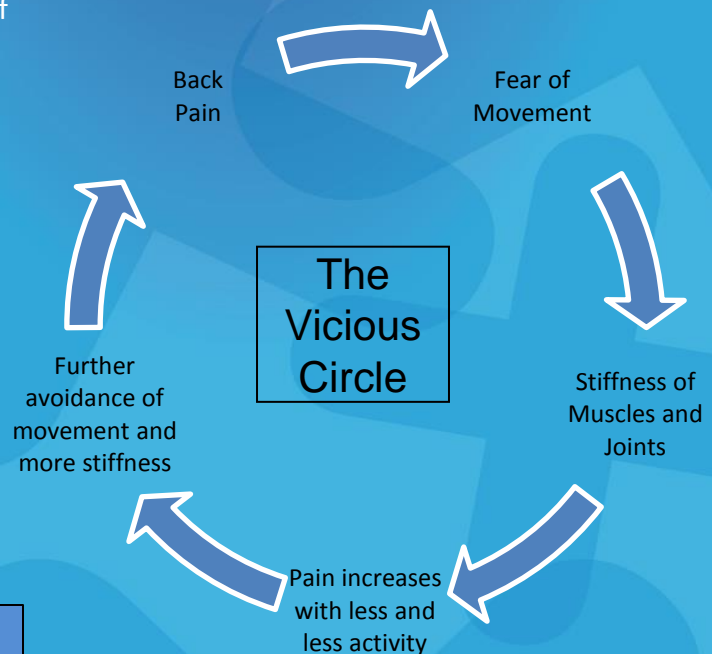
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- Use something to control the pain- see your GP if you need stronger painkillers
- Use heat or cold
- Modify your activities.
- Stay active and at work.

If the pain is severe, continues to worsen or does not improve over a 4-6 week period, see your GP who may refer you to see a Physiotherapist for further advice and exercise. Also see a doctor straight away if you feel unwell, or develop pins and needles or numbness in both legs, numbness round your back passage or genitals or loss of control of your bladder or bowel.

Prevention of back pain

- Keep exercising regularly!
- Keep a good posture at home and work
- Ensure you lift correctly
- Keep active throughout the day – change your posture every 30 minutes
- Reduce stress and tension



Useful websites

www.hse.gov.uk/msd/backpain

www.backcare.org.uk