

## Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Outpatient Department

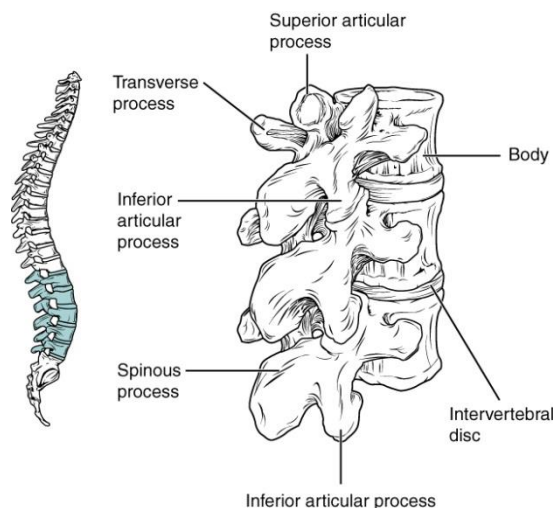
### Lower Back Pain Advice Leaflet

This information supports the physiotherapy management of your low back pain. When you have had low back pain that has lasted longer than expected or keeps reoccurring it can be alarming. It can be very painful and cause much misery and disruption to day to day activity. It is important to remember that back pain is common, but serious or permanent damage is rare. In most cases, pain is caused by a simple strain to a muscle or a ligament and should resolve within 12 weeks.

How you deal with your back pain is often more important than an exact diagnosis or specific treatment. It is often difficult to find the exact cause of low back pain as the spine is made up of many components.

- The vertebrae are strong solid blocks of bone and are joined by discs enabling the spine to be strong yet flexible.
- The ligaments reinforce this structure and the muscles offer more protection.
- The interaction between all these parts after an injury can change the way we move causing pain.

Evidence has shown that having a better understanding of the how the spine works and how the body experiences pain can help people manage better.



### Stay Active

Everyday activity and normal movement is an important part of treating low back pain. The body likes to move as it encourages circulation, muscle length and strength and improves our sense of wellbeing. The opposite of which tends to happen if you remain still and stiff. Bed rest for more than a day or two is now considered the least helpful treatment.

When you are in pain you may move differently to try to ease the pain. This may be helpful to begin with but as time goes on this can become an unhelpful habit. Often you may find yourself tensing in anticipation of pain during daily tasks. It is important to begin to realise how and why you move the way you do. Try to move freely and as normally as possible. Through gentle exercises normal relaxed movement of the spine can be encouraged.

Exercise might make your back feel a bit sore at first, but it will not cause any harm. Start off slowly and gradually increase the amount of exercise you do. Over time, your back will get stronger and more flexible and this should reduce pain.

Try to find an exercise or movement you enjoy as you are most likely to continue this and see the benefits. What matters most is you keep moving, rather than the particular type of movement.

### **Regular medication**

Do not be afraid to take painkillers to enable you to stay active. Your body's warning systems will not be affected and will still warn you if you are putting yourself at increased risk of aggravating your back. Taken properly, simple painkillers such as paracetamol can be most effective and allow you to keep moving. Your GP or Pharmacist can advise you how you can use medication to manage your low back pain.

### **Heat**

You may find that applying heat to the sore area helps relieve your pain and any associated muscular tightness/spasm. Use a microwaveable wheat bag or a hot water bottle wrapped in a towel. Keep it on for 15 – 20 minutes, checking your skin from time to time. Repeat up to three times a day.

### **Lifestyle factors**

Mood, stress, repetitive movements, sustained postures (sitting, standing, driving) throughout your everyday life can aggravate your back. It is important to consider your daily routine. Simple changes can make a big difference. Regular breaks, postural advice, lifting techniques and relaxation methods may help you.

### **Treatment options**

After the advice above, the following treatment options have been shown to help people with low back pain. They are recommended in the NHS and are provided by our physiotherapy department.

- An exercise programme: one to one sessions, Pilates based or a gym based back class.
- A course of manual therapy: including mobilisation, massage or manipulation. This is most effective when used jointly with exercise and lifestyle changes.

Foot supports, special shoes, belts, corsets, acupuncture, traction (stretching the back using weights or machines) and electrotherapy (passing electric current or ultrasound waves through the body) are no longer routinely recommended.

### **You may find the following websites useful:**

- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence: Low back Pain and sciatica in over 16s: assessment and management.  
<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng59/ifp/chapter/Low-back-pain-and-sciatica-the-care-you-should-expect>
- The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy <https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/10-things-you-need-know-about-your-back>
- Versus Arthritis <https://www.versusarthritis.org/about-arthritis/conditions/back-pain/>
- Back Care <http://www.backcare.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Exercises-for-Back-Pain-Factsheet.pdf>

## Exercises for Lower Back Pain

Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Department, Telephone: 01603 286990

### **Pelvic Tilt**

Lying on your back with knees bent and arms by your side. Imagine a bowl of water on your stomach. Try to tip the water out the bowl towards your head and shoulders.



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Gently push through your heels. Feel you are using your gluteal (bottom) muscles and your abdominals (tummy) muscles to allow you to move BUT DO NOT hold tension in these muscles or hold your breath.

Feel each vertebrae move in turn from your tailbone to your middle back as you tilt up, from your chest to your tailbone as you relax back down.

Repeat 5 - 10 times.

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### **Lumbar Spine Flexion**



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Lying with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. One at a time, bring your knees closer to your chest to let your lower back round.

With both knees now in this position, draw your knees to the position where your back feels most stiff and gently rock your knees closer to your chest 10 times.

Keep your head and neck relaxed. Do not push through pain. Put each leg down to the ground one at a time. Maintain control of your lower back (keep your core muscles engaged /working) as you lower your legs back down. Do not allow your back to arch off the bed/floor.

Repeat 2 - 3 times. You should feel your back loosen the more you do.

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### **Standing Pelvic Tilt Against a Wall**



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Bend knees slightly and breathe out while tilting your pelvis backwards to flatten your lower back against a wall.

The back of your head should be stretched upwards with your chin in. Keep your shoulders and neck relaxed.

Hold for approx. 20 seconds. Stand tall. Relax, but maintain length of spine. Repeat 2 -3 times.

## **Exercises for Lower Back Pain**



### **Standing Pelvic Tilt**

Bend your knees slightly and breathe out while tilting your pelvis backwards to flatten your lower back.

The back of your head should be stretched upwards with your chin in. Keep your shoulders and neck relaxed.

Hold for approx. 20 seconds. Stand tall. Relax, but maintain length of spine.  
Repeat 2 -3 times.



### **Standing Pelvic Tilt with Chair**

Stand in front of a table or chair holding on to the support with both hands. Bend your knees slightly and breathe out while tilting your pelvis backwards to flatten your lower back.

The back of your head should be stretched upwards with your chin in. Keep your shoulders and neck relaxed.

Hold for approx. 20 seconds. Stand tall. Relax, but maintain length of spine.  
Repeat 2 -3 times.



### **Seated Flexion**

Sit on a chair with your legs apart. Bend your head and trunk down between your knees rounding your upper body as much as possible.

Try to move as freely as possible through every segment of your spine.

Do not force the movement if you have leg pain that worsens with the exercise.

Repeat 2-3 times.