

Physiotherapy Department, Horton Hospital

# **Low Back Pain**

**Information for Patients**

## Low back pain

Low back pain is very common and what you do in the early stages is important.

The spine is one of the strongest parts of your body and its structure is designed for movement. It is surrounded by strong muscles and ligaments which support and protect the spine.

Rest for more than a couple of days after the onset of low back pain is not advised because the spine needs movement in order to start to get better.

Any acute pain will usually improve within a few days or weeks so that you can return to your normal activities.

Your GP will be able to discuss your pain and may prescribe pain relief medication in the early days to ease the discomfort and help you to start to move. Being mobile will then help your back to get better more quickly and you will be able to reduce your medication.

Although back pain is very distressing, in most cases it is not due to any serious disease or damage.

## Why keep active?

- Moving around will prevent the joints in the spine from getting stiff. Stiff joints can become painful.
- It will keep your muscles strong.
- You will feel more positive.
- It will reduce the severity of your pain.
- You are more likely to be able to return to work quickly.

## What sort of activity?

Research has shown that people who do regular exercise are less likely to develop chronic back pain. The type of exercise you should do will vary depending on what stage you are at after your back pain started.

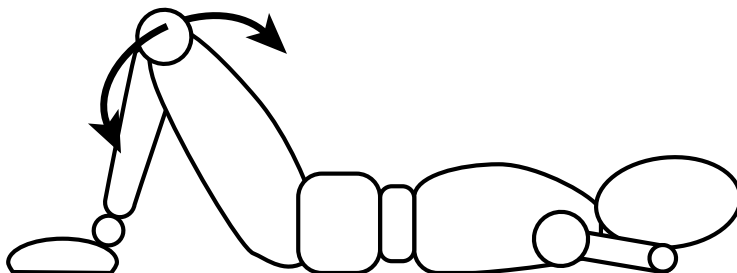
There is no 'perfect' type of exercise for low back pain. It is therefore much better that you do a type of exercise which you enjoy and are likely to stick to. This could include:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Pilates
- Yoga
- Dancing
- Sport

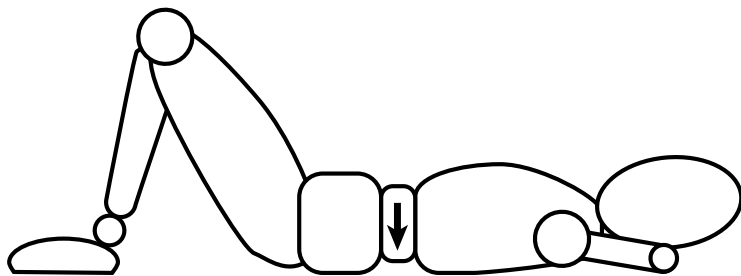
However, in the early days or weeks, simple exercises to get you moving, which can be done on your bed, together with continuing your usual activities at home, will be enough.

These exercises could include:

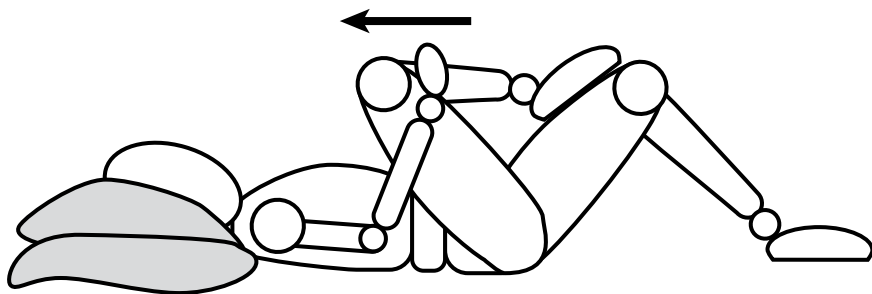
- **Knee rolling** – lie on your back with your knees bent. Gently roll your knees from side to side. Start with very small movements and increase as your joints loosen up. Do this for ½ - 1 minute.



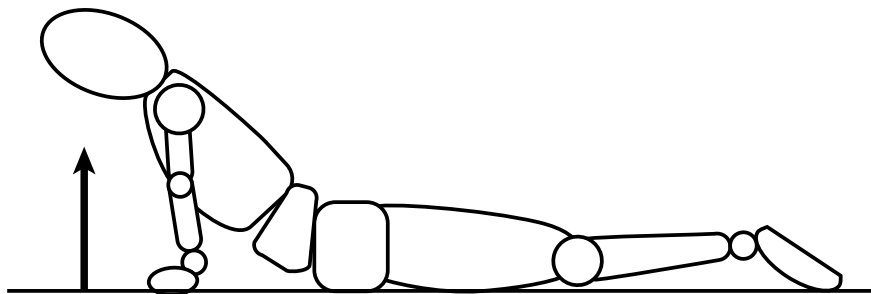
- **Pelvic tilting** – in the same position, flatten the low back onto the bed and then release slowly. Do this in a gentle rocking motion for ½ - 1 minute.



- **Knees to chest** – in the same position, grasp your right knee and gently pull it towards your right shoulder. Pause for a couple of seconds and then return to the starting position. Repeat with the left leg. Try 5 times on each leg. As you feel more comfortable with this exercise you can try it with both knees together.



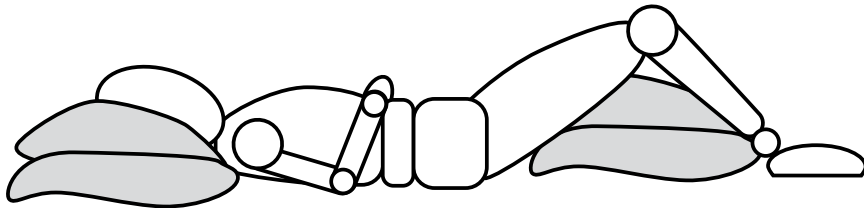
- **Back extension** – lying face down on the bed with both hands under your shoulders, straighten your elbows so that your upper trunk lifts off the bed. Keep the front of your hips on the bed and your pelvis and legs relaxed. You may find that you can only partially straighten your arms – this is fine. Repeat up to 10 times.



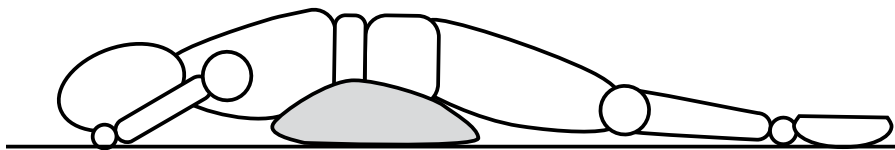
It is a good sign if a position or exercise causes the pain to reduce or move to the middle of your back. Use these positions often and keep going with the exercises. It is a bad sign if a position or exercise causes pain to increase or move down into your buttock or leg. Avoid these positions and stop doing the exercise immediately.

## Comfortable positions

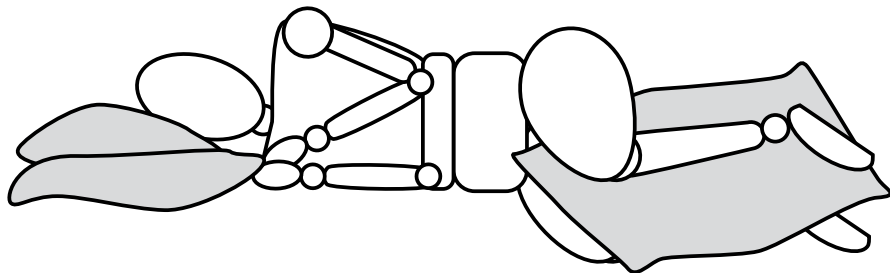
- Lie on your back with a pillow or two under your knees.



- Lie flat on your front. If this is too painful try again with one or two pillows under your hips. As your pain eases, remove the pillows so that you are completely flat.



- Lie on your side with a pillow between your knees. Sometimes a rolled up towel around your waist also helps.



- Sitting is often very uncomfortable and it is best to only sit for short periods of time. If you have to sit it may help to sit on an upright chair with a small, rolled towel in the hollow of your back.

## Signs to look out for

Consult your doctor urgently if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Loss of control of your bladder or bowel
- Any numbness radiating into your buttock or leg
- Severe worsening of the pain.

## Further information

- The Back Book - UK Edition: Authors: Kim Burton et al. 2002. Published by TSO (The Stationery Office)
- [www.nhsdirect.co.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.co.uk)
- [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

