
PATIENT INFORMATION – BACK PAIN

What to do when you get home

- Get moving as soon as possible
- Take regular pain relief if necessary. Painkillers and anti-inflammatory drugs can be taken if prescribed by a doctor. A pharmacist can also provide advice on pain relief*.
- Relaxation and massage techniques can sometimes help, but try not to worry about back pain as muscle tension can make symptoms worse.
- Hot and cold treatments may help, for example a hot bath or hot water bottle (take care not to burn) or an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables to the painful area, however be careful to wrap the frozen packs in a wet cloth first. Also another option is to alternate the hot and cold treatments.
- When you are able, depending on the pain, increase your level of activity, this can be walking around the house to walking to the shops. Also swimming is particularly good for people with back problems (check with your GP if you have not exercised before).
- Maintaining a good posture will also help, try not to slouch when sitting, keep a hollow in your lower back and avoid sitting for long periods.

What to do if other symptoms develop

If you develop any of the following you should seek medical advice straight away.

- Loss of bowel and bladder control or difficulty in passing urine
- Having to drag your feet, or leg weakness
- Shooting pains and pins and needles in your legs
- Fever

- Swelling in the back area

Possible causes of back pain

Backs are quite a complex part of your body being made up of bones, muscles, nerves and joints, and in most cases pinpointing the cause can be very difficult. Although back pain can be caused by minor injuries, strains or an irritated nerve, it can also be triggered by everyday stresses and strains such as:

- Overuse of the muscles (sport or repetitive movements)
- Standing or bending down for long periods
- Lifting, carrying, bending, pushing or pulling incorrectly
- Twisting and overstretching
- Slouching or hunching in chairs and whilst driving
- Stress, anxiety and tension which increase muscle tension and the chance of a sudden sprain

Back pain can suddenly develop for no apparent reason and you may not even know what actually caused it.

If your back pain persists for more than 6 weeks you may need further investigation by your GP.

***Pain relief advice**

You may have been given some pain relief by the health professionals in the Accident and Emergency Department. If this runs out and you need further pain relief, you can speak to a pharmacist for advice. Some common painkillers are available to buy over the counter, for e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen. Always follow the instructions on the packet if you are taking these, and seek further advice from the pharmacist should you have any concerns, particularly if it is for a child.



If you become unwell or are injured, choose the right NHS service to make sure you get the best treatment. The Choose Well campaign explains what each NHS service does, and when it should be used.

Choosing well means that you and your family will get the best treatment. It also allows busy NHS services to help the people who need them most.

If you are unsure about which option to choose, please call NHS Direct Wales on 0845 46 47 or visit the Choose Well website at www.choosewellwales.org.uk

This information has been produced based on previous information leaflets and the evidence available at the time of publication. It has been clinically reviewed however if you notice anything that needs updating or amending please contact ppi.team@wales.nhs.uk

If you require this information in another language or format please ask a member of staff.

For further advice or information contact NHS Direct Wales 0845 46 47
www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk