

Keep on moving: tips on exercise

When you have back pain it is crucial for you to keep moving. Movement is something that you can do that contributes to your back getting better. Part of the process of the back getting better is allowing time for the body's natural healing to occur - this will be much better if you continue to move, even if this causes some discomfort it does not cause harm. Remember, the spine is designed to move.



Movement, exercises and activity

Avoids stiffness developing in the back.

Prevents your muscles becoming weak.

Maintains your tolerance to movement.

Gives you confidence and prevents anxiety about movement.

What harm can result from movement, exercise and activity?

None - as long as you follow the advice below

You may experience some discomfort during movement, but the longer-term outcome will be better for movement.

So what should I do?

The following advice is general and not specific to anybody's particular back pain. Try and do at least one of the following activities, they will not damage your spine. You may experience some discomfort after doing the activity - this should settle down soon afterwards, if you are very uncomfortable after, it may be a sign you have done too much. However you should not stop moving, just go a little more gently and build up gradually.

1. For pain relief, try lying down on your back with both of your knees bent up. No one position is the best so listen to your body. The main thing is to keep changing your position regularly.

2. Walking. Try to walk (even when it hurts) every hour. You might only manage to walk from one room to the next, this will help you recover. If you are able, try to walk a little further and try to increase the distance a little each day. 2 small walks a day is often helpful instead of 1 long walk but do as much as you feel you can.

3. Standing exercises. Movement is the key. No one exercise has been shown to be the best so feel free to experiment with the following movements and do the ones you feel help you. For all exercises repeat between 5-10 times and try to do every few hours.

These may be mildly uncomfortable but if they make pains travel down your legs then stop and get more guidance from your GP practice or physiotherapist.

A: Arch back.

Stand up straight and gently bend backwards from the hips. If it is more comfortable support your lower back with your hands. Lean backwards then return to the starting position.



B: Bend forwards.

Try to bend as naturally as you can. Imagining you need to reach your shoes or socks. Return back to the upright position.



C: Tilting sideways.

Try to run your hand down the outside of your leg and tilt your back sideways. Some people may find one way easier than the other. Start with the easier direction and work up to the other side. Try to move as naturally as you can.



D: Squats

Try to keep moving your whole body. Squats involve the whole body and will also help keep the strength in your legs. There is no perfect method so just try to move naturally. The pictures show a couple of ways to squat. Slowly bend down then back up again. You do not have to go all of the way down. Try to do 10-20 and again repeat every few hours.



4. Sitting exercises. The advice remains the same: Do between 5-10 repetitions and do every few hours. These may be mildly uncomfortable but if they make pains travel down your legs then stop and get more guidance from your GP practice or physiotherapist.

A: Bend forwards then back up to the start position (normal sitting posture).



B: Arch backwards then return to the start position. Some people like to put their hands behind their head. Some cross their arms over their chest. Chose what feels best for you.



C: Tilt sideways to the left and then the right. Some people may find one way easier than the other. Start with the easier direction and work up to the other side. Try to move as naturally as you can.



D: Arch up (sit up tall) then slump down.



E: Best chair exercise: Get out of it and get moving as much as your symptoms allow you to. Try to vary your positions (some time sitting but change to standing, then walking, then back to sitting. Keep repeating).



If you feel things are not improving or worsening, then feel free to visit your GP practice for further guidance. They may consider referring you to a physiotherapy service.

You may find that if you see a physiotherapist and you may be given additional exercises or movements to perform depending on the specific nature of your back pain. This is fine, the advice above is general and appropriate for the vast majority of back pain.