

Advice Sheet for Back Pain

WHAT IS BACK PAIN?

Back pain is a broad term for any pain being experienced in the low, mid and upper back.

WHAT CAUSES BACK PAIN?

There are many causes for back pain. Some of the main causes are as follows:

- Being overweight
- Leading a sedentary lifestyle
- Sudden change in activity levels
- Poor posture

Back pain can come from the following structures:

- Muscular/ligament pain caused by strain, weakness, poor posture, poor lifting, imbalances, stress, overuse, medication side effects etc.
- Disc herniation/prolapse
- Nerve root impingement
- Spinal degeneration

There are many more causes of back pain including more serious pathologies than above.

SYMPTOMS

Back pain presents in many ways. However, here are some of the more common presentations:

- Persistent ache or stiffness along your spine from the base of the neck all down through to the tail bone.
- Sharp or more localized pain in any region of the spine.
- Chronic/constant ache in the low or middle back, mainly after maintaining a position like standing or sitting for prolonged periods or during/after a certain movement like bending forward.
- Pain that radiates from the base of the back into the lower limbs.
- Inability to perform certain movements without sudden painful spasm.

HOW TO LOOK AFTER IT AT HOME

What you do at home can have a positive influence on your back pain. Following guidance from your Chartered Physiotherapist you can try the following:

- Heat therapy/Ice therapy
- Exercise – keeping moving is vital. Choose gentle forms of exercise such as walking or swimming.
- Stretching and flexibility as prescribed by your Chartered Physiotherapist
- Self soft tissue release through massage, foam rolling or trigger point therapy.
- Avoid staying in one position for too long, lifting heavy objects for driving for prolonged periods.

PROFESSIONAL TREATMENT

When symptoms persist, or get any worse you should consult a professional.

Who should I go to:

- Physiotherapist
- Doctor

Chartered Physiotherapists are experts at treating back pain. They are also highly educated to realise when pain is more sinister and will refer you in the necessary direction straight away.

Physiotherapists will treat back pain in different ways depending on several factors. However, the main ways are through exercise programmes, manual therapy and electrotherapy.

If you experience any loss of bladder control; pins & needles or numbness in the saddle region; or significant weakness in the legs consult with your GP.

PREVENTION

- Maintain good posture when sitting, standing and lifting
- Exercise regularly
- Strengthen your specific core stabilisers. Pilates can be a great way to do this.
- Maintain a healthy BMI