

# Low Back Pain

## Patient Information Leaflet

MSK Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service



View our other **MSK Physiotherapy** resources

[www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/)

## What causes low back pain?

Lower back pain is very common. Around 80% of adults will experience back pain at some point in their life. Some people may experience back pain more frequently. Back pain can hurt a lot but it is **rarely caused by anything serious**.

Some common causes of low back pain are:

- muscle pain – this can be from lifting awkwardly, a sporting injury or work activities
- age-related changes – also known as spondylosis
- sudden changes in activity levels – doing much more than usual or being much less active can cause pain
- poor sleep, stress, low mood, or feeling run down can also make pain worse

Sometimes back pain starts slowly, and we don't know why. Even then, **scans are usually not needed** and do not change treatment. The good news is that **most back pain improves within a few weeks**.

## What are the symptoms?

Everyone's symptoms are different, but you may experience:

- aching or stiffness in your lower back

- pain that spreads into the hips, buttocks or leg.
- pain when bending or moving
- stiffness after sitting or resting for a while

It is normal for pain to change day to day. This does **not** mean you are doing damage.

## Self-help

Most new back pain will improve within **6-8 weeks**.

Following some of these useful tips should help:

- change your activity levels – we do **not** recommend complete rest but changing or slightly reducing your activity levels can help in the early stages.
- keep moving – short walks and gentle movement can help reduce stiffness.
- simple pain relief – ask a pharmacist or GP for advice first.
- stay at work or return as soon as you can – your employer or GP can help with adjustments.
- look after your sleep and stress levels – both can affect pain.
- try gentle exercises – moving regularly and doing simple exercises can help.
- use heat – a heat pack/hot water bottle can help reduce pain (don't put it straight on your skin).

## Should I refer myself to physiotherapy?

You may benefit from physiotherapy if:

- your pain is not improving after a few weeks
- you are struggling to return to work or normal activities
- you keep getting episodes of back pain
- you would like more advice on exercises and recovery

## When should I seek urgent medical advice?

Back pain is rarely serious, however you should **go to Accident & Emergency now** if, **within the last 4 weeks** you have noticed:

- altered feeling when using toilet paper to wipe yourself
- change in ability to achieve an erection or ejaculate
- inability to stop a bowel movement or leaking
- increasing difficulty when you try to stop or control your flow of urine
- increasing difficulty when you try to urinate
- leaking urine or recent need to use pads
- loss of feeling or pins and needles between your inner thighs or genitals

- loss of sensation when you pass a bowel motion
- loss of sensation when you pass urine
- not knowing when your bladder is either full or empty
- numbness in or around your back passage or buttocks
- severe weakness in your legs or your ankle is not moving properly when walking

You should contact your **GP or call 111 urgently** if you have:

- new, unexplained lower back pain, accompanied by a history of any of the following
  - cancer
  - HIV
  - TB (Tuberculosis)
  - inflammatory arthritis
- lower back pain combined with any of the following
  - feeling unwell
  - a loss of appetite
  - fever
  - unexplained weight loss
  - night sweats

## Remember

Most low back pain improves with time, movement and the right advice. Staying active and confident in your movement helps your recovery.



If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.



## MSK Physiotherapy Service

Find out more about the MSK Physiotherapy Service and what we offer

[www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/)



## Further Resources

Access our other MSK Physiotherapy resources [www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-](http://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/)

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