

Low back pain

This leaflet is for patients experiencing pain in their lumbar spine (lower back) and gives advice and exercises to help you manage your condition.

Low back pain is very common and what you do when you first experience it is important. The spine is one of the strongest parts of your body. The way it is put together is designed for movement. It is surrounded by strong muscles and ligaments that support and protect the spine. Resting for more than a couple of days after low back pain starts to hurt is not a good idea. This is because the spine needs movement in order to get better. With the right management, back pain will usually improve within a few days or weeks, so that you are able to return to normal activity.

Your GP will be able to discuss pain management with you. They may prescribe pain relief medication in the early days to ease the discomfort and to help you to start to move. Being mobile will help your back to get better more quickly and you will then 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 and imaging such as X-rays is usually not required.

Why do I need to keep active?

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

What sort of activity should I do?

Research has shown that if you do regular exercise your back pain is less likely to become a long-term back problem for you.

The type of exercise will vary depending on your level of fitness.

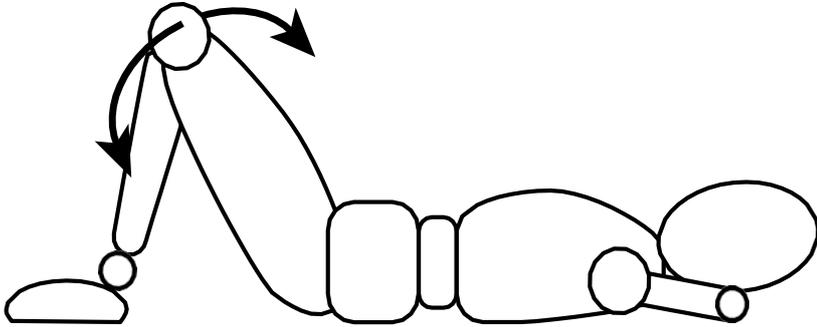
There is no 'perfect' type of exercise for low back pain. It is much better that you do a type of exercise that you enjoy and are likely to stick to. This could include:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Pilates
- Yoga
- Dancing

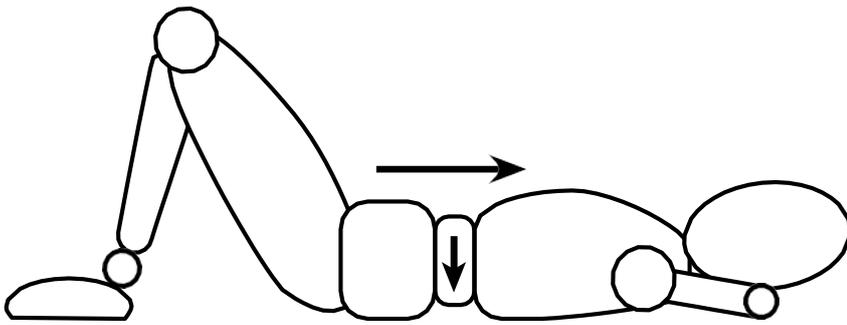
However, in the early days or weeks, you can do some simple exercises to get you moving. Together with continuing your usual activities at home, these should be enough to help.

Simple exercises

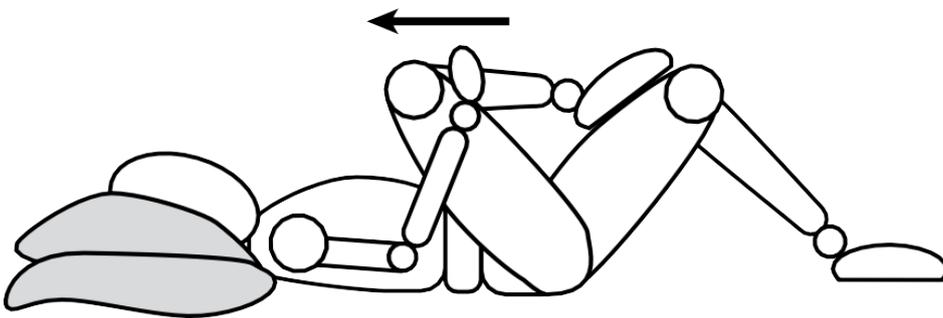
Knee rolling – lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the bed. Gently lower your knees from side to side. Start with very small movements and increase how far your knees move from side to side as your joints loosen up. Do this for 30 seconds to 1 minute.



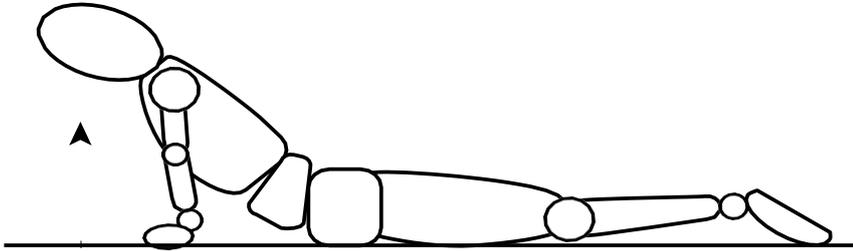
Pelvic tilting – in the same position, flatten your lower back onto the bed so that the front of your pelvis tilts towards your ribs and then release slowly. Do this in a gentle rocking motion for 30 seconds to 1 minute.



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



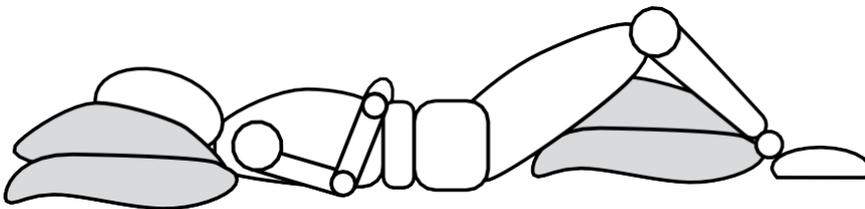
Back extension – lie face down on the bed with both hands under your shoulders. Your elbows can be pointing either down towards your toes or out to the side, whichever is more comfortable for you. Straighten your arms so that your upper trunk lifts off the bed. Keep the front of your hips on the bed 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.



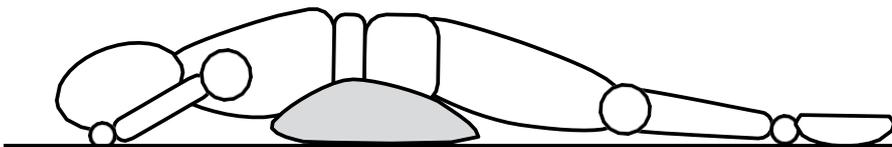
- It is a good sign if a position or exercise causes your pain to reduce or move to the middle of your back. Use these positions often and keep going with the exercises.
- It is a bad sign if a position or exercise causes your pain to increase or move down into your buttock or leg. If this happens, avoid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

Comfortable positions

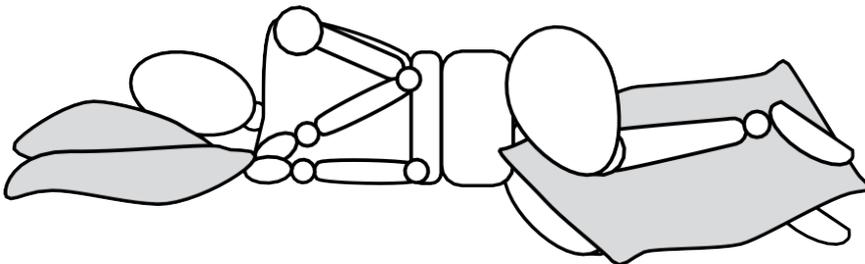
Lie on your back with a pillow or two under your knees.



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 so 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.

When to seek urgent medical advice

Please return to the Emergency Department (A&E) immediately if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty passing urine
- Loss of control of your bladder or bowels
- Numbness around your bottom or genitals
- Pain spreading down both legs

Further information can be found from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy at <https://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/back-pain>

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To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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