



# Low back pain

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

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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. It is meant for movement and is surrounded by strong muscles and ligaments that support and protect it.

It is not a good idea to rest for more than a couple of days after low back pain starts. This is because the spine needs movement to get better. 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.

With the right management, back pain will usually improve enough within a few days or weeks that you are able to return to normal activity. Although back pain is very distressing, in most cases it is not due to any serious disease or damage and imaging, such as X-ray, is not usually required.

## Why do I need to keep active?

- It will reduce the severity of your pain
- It will prevent the joints in your spine from getting stiff
- It will keep your muscles strong
- You will feel more positive
- You are more likely to be able to return to activities or work quickly

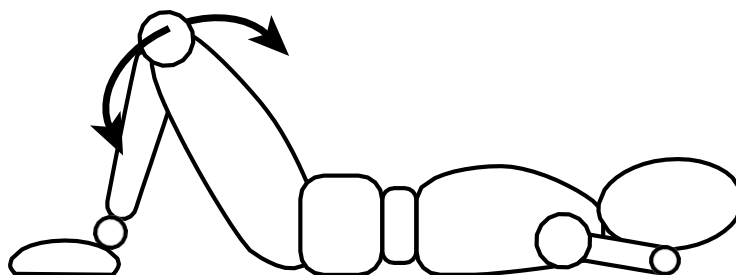
## What sort of activity should I do?

Research has shown that people who do regular exercise are less likely to develop long-term back pain. There is no 'perfect' type of exercise for low back pain. It is much better that you do exercise that you enjoy and are likely to continue. This could include walking, swimming, or yoga.

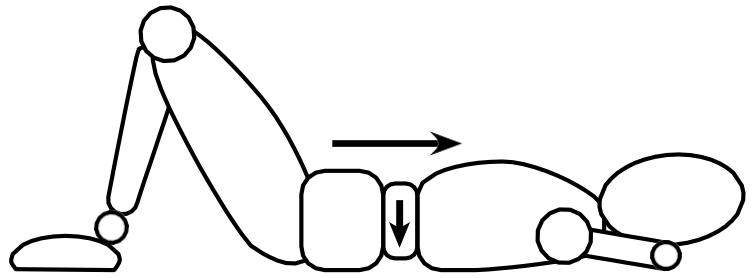
However, in the early days and weeks, you can do simple exercises like the ones below to get you moving. Along with continuing your usual activities at home, these will be enough to help.

## Simple exercises

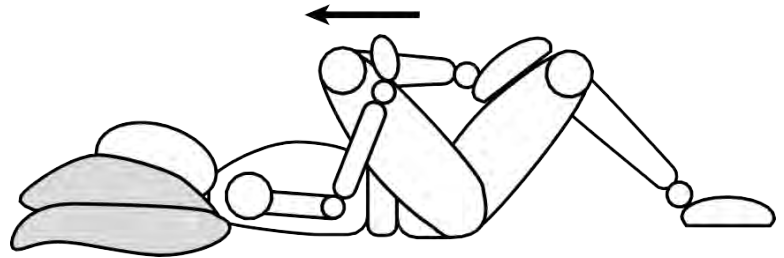
**Knee rolling:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the bed. Gently lower your knees from side to side. Start with very small movements and increase as your joints loosen up. Do this for 30 to 60 seconds.



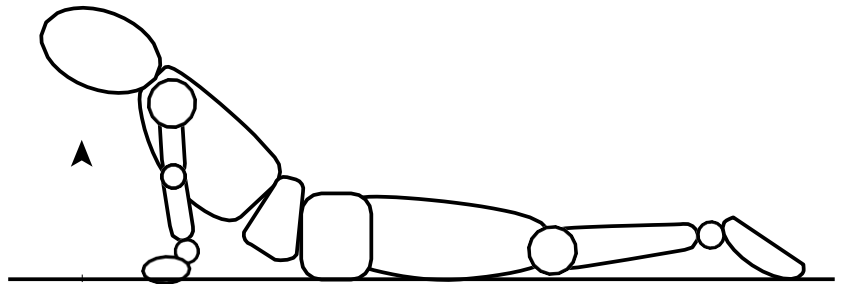
**Pelvic tilting:** In the same position, flatten your lower back onto the bed so that the front of your pelvis tilts towards your ribs and then release slowly. Do this in a gentle rocking motion for 30 to 60 seconds.



**Knees to chest:** In the same position, grasp one knee and gently pull it towards the same shoulder. Try to keep your shoulders on the bed. Pause for a couple of seconds and then release. Repeat with the other leg. Try five times on each side. As you feel more comfortable, you can try this exercise with both knees together.

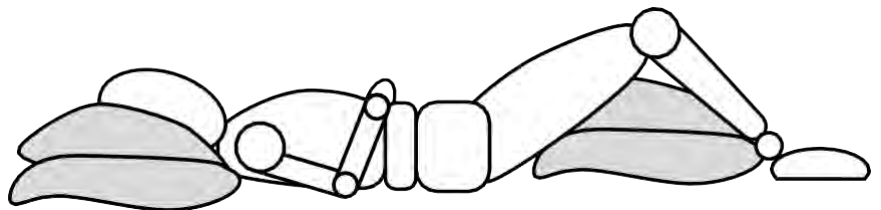


**Back extension:** Lying face-down on the bed with both hands under your shoulders. Your elbows can either be pointing down to your toes or out to the side, whichever is more comfortable for you. Straighten your arms so that your upper trunk lifts off the bed. Keep the front of your hips on the bed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

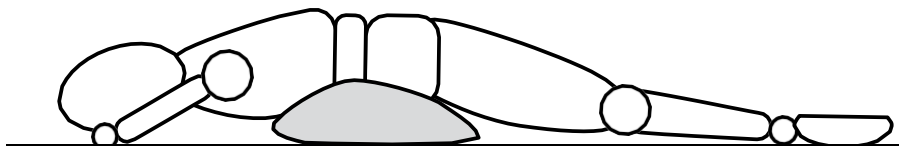


### Comfortable positions

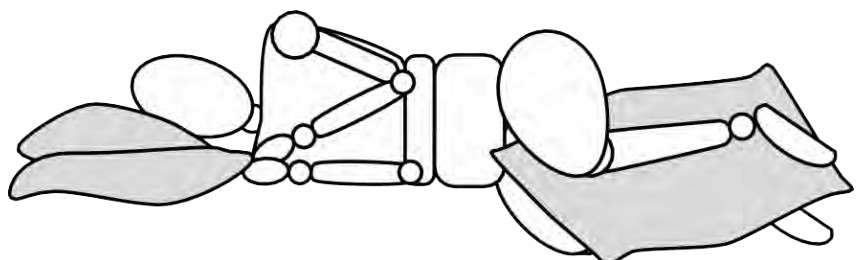
Lie on your back with a pillow or two under your knees.



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.



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 have an upright chair with a small, rolled towel in the hollow of your back.

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. Avoid these positions and stop doing the exercise immediately.

## **When to seek urgent medical advice**

Many people have a combination of back pain, leg pain, leg numbness and/or weakness. These symptoms can be distressing but don't necessarily require emergency medical attention.

**Please do return to the Emergency Department immediately if you newly develop any of the following symptoms along with your back pain:**

- Loss of feeling or pins and needles around your anus (back passage) or genitals.
- Loss of feeling when you pass urine, difficulty trying to start or stop the flow, leaking, or not knowing when your bladder is full or empty.
- Loss of feeling when you pass a bowel motion, difficulty stopping a bowel motion, or leaking.
- Inability to achieve an erection or ejaculate.

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

## **How to contact us**

Emergency Department  
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Reading RG1 5AN  
Tel: 0118 322 5111

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

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| <b>Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.</b> |
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Reviewed and updated by:

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