

About low back pain

Low back pain is very common. Fortunately, most people find that it only lasts a few days or weeks.

The exact cause of low back pain is often difficult to find. Tension, soreness and / or stiffness are common symptoms. Joints, connective tissue and discs may contribute to the symptoms.

With the right information, support and treatment most people find they can manage their low back pain and get better quickly.

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet explains what you can do to help you recover from low back pain and return to your normal activities as soon as possible.

It is aimed at people who have acute and chronic low back pain with radiating pain or altered sensation into the buttocks and/or leg (nerve compression signs).

It **isn't** for people whose back pain is caused by a fracture, an infection or an inflammatory disease.

Diagnosis - finding out what's wrong

When you see our Osteopaths, they will ask you questions and examine you. Occasionally, low back pain is caused by an underlying condition - if our Osteopaths thinks this is possible, you may be referred for a type of scan called an MRI at [Vista Diagnostics](#). Otherwise you won't need an x-ray or MRI scan, because they won't help to find the cause of your back pain or in deciding how best to treat it (and it's advisable to avoid unnecessary x-rays and scans).

What you can do

You can do the following things to help you manage your low back pain, recover quickly and continue doing the things you like doing - they may also help if you get low back pain again in the future:

- **Stay active:** although the pain can make this seem difficult, maintaining and gradually increasing your daily activity can help your back. Rest when you need to, but avoid excessive bed rest because this will not help your recovery.
- **Regular medication:** taking painkillers will allow you to remain active - don't wait until the pain gets too much. Painkillers will not mask your body's warning signals or increase the risk of damaging your back.
- **Regular exercise and physical activity:** this helps to keep you back fit and healthy. Walking, swimming and yoga are popular, but it is important to do an enjoyable activity that you can benefit from without making your pain worse. Our Osteopaths can help you choose and exercise programme that suit you.
- **Change lifestyle factors;** check for everyday things that might be aggravating your back. These might include stress, repetitive and / or uncomfortable postures at work, at home or while driving, or long periods of sitting. Remember that activities that you do on an irregular basis such as gardening is physical work and needs to undertaken sensible—break tasks down into manageable chunks!

Treatment

It can be difficult to predict who might benefit from Osteopathic treatment and rehabilitation.

Our Osteopaths will...

- discuss the available options with you, and together you can decide how to manage your low back pain.
- advise and discuss with you their working diagnosis. An appropriate treatment plan will be offered to you for your agreement as well as advice on a home/work exercise programme and preventative measures to reduce your risk of reoccurrence.

Medication

Most of us don't like taking medication but there is a place for pain relieving and inflammation reducing medication on occasions where other pain relieving measures like cold therapy are not feasible.

Paracetamol is usually the first option you should try. If this isn't very effective, your GP may offer you a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), such as ibuprofen, or an opioid such as codeine (or occasionally both).

Muscle relaxants are indicated during severe acute muscle spasm as a short term measure to aid the healing and rehabilitation process.

[BioFreeze](#) is a herbal anti-inflammatory that we use during treatment and recommend as an alternative or in conjunction with medication. Biofreeze can be applied up to 6 times per day and apart from rare skin irritation has no adverse effects. You can purchase BioFreeze from our reception as a tube, roll on or pump dispenser.

Low Back Pain

Intensive treatment programme

We have a special interest in post disc injury. We aim to provide effective pain management strategies through a combination of treatment aimed at initially reducing inflammation then the restoration of function through flexibility, core stability and strength training. We continue to monitor and benchmark throughout the process, referring if symptoms do not respond favourable to treatment.

Surgery

Only a very small number of people with back pain actually require and undergo surgery. We also offer post surgical rehabilitation again through flexibility, core stability and strength training. See our sample exercise leaflets for more information.

If you have any of the following symptoms as well as low back pain, see your GP immediately:

- ***Muscle weakness in your legs***
- ***Radiating pain into both legs***
- ***Reduced or altered feeling in your legs, buttocks or the genital area***
- ***Problems with bowel or bladder function***
- ***Feeling generally unwell, unexplained tiredness***
- ***Unremitting pain which is nonresponsive to pain killers***
- ***Night time pain/hot & cold sweats***

More information

If you choose to have treatments with an Osteopath you should ensure that they are registered with the regulatory body:

- General Osteopathic Council
www.osteopathy.org.uk

When searching for additional information on how to manage your low back pain, it is important to check that the information is reliable and trustworthy. The following sources may be useful:

- BackCare: a national charity that helps people on how to reduce the impact of back pain by providing education, information and support (www.backcare.org.uk; 0845 130 2704)
- NICE: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has developed a booklet that tells you more about the treatment and care you can expect from the NHS for your low back pain (www.nice.org.uk/CG88publicinfo)
- NHS Direct: can give you advice on how to manage back pain (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk; 0845 4647)
- For information on disc injuries and sciatica, (www.chirogeek.com)
- For information on low back health, (www.spineuniverse.com/)
- Find a Local Osteopath (www.osteopathy.org.uk)
- Proactive Osteopathy Maidstone (www.proactive-osteopathy.com)

