

What is the back pain programme?

As a patient with a new episode of back pain or sciatica (leg pain), you are part of the Regional Back Pain Programme in your local area. This means that from the outset you will receive **the right advice and guidance** on how to manage your new episode of back pain from your GP or NHS physiotherapist and understand when it is necessary to seek further help and advice.

All about back problems

Back problems are very common. Most back problems start for no obvious reason, which can be very frustrating. Your back problem may cause aching, hot, burning, shooting, or stabbing pains in your back and sometimes into one or both of your legs. You may also get pins and needles. The spine is strong and back problems are rarely due to any serious disease or damage. Back problems should settle within 6 weeks of following the advice provided here. **You will not normally need an X-ray or an MRI scan.**

What should I do?

- Keep moving, even if slowly at first.
- Keep living and working normally. This is important and is the best way to get better.
- Don't worry if your back still hurts at work, consider doing light tasks at first, speak to your manager about work concerns that you may have.
- Don't sit down for too long, change positions regularly wherever you are.
- Avoid bed rest during the day.
- Stay active and remember to re-introduce activities like heavy lifting gradually.
- Exercise really helps your back and can relieve pain, start with light fitness training. Moving will make you stronger, keeping active is the best thing you can do.

What about pain relief?

Painkillers may help you keep moving, so sensible use of painkillers will help, not harm your back. However, if you are already taking medication for something else or have other health problems, check with your local pharmacist before taking painkillers. Always follow the instructions on the packet.

Initially it may be helpful to use a covered icepack to ease your pain - never apply ice directly onto your skin. Alternatively heat can be soothing, so a covered hot water bottle may also be used. You should not use heat /ice for more than 15 minutes, three to four times a day.

What about work, sports?

You will recover faster if you can stay at or get back to work as early as possible. Don't worry if your back still hurts; consider doing light tasks at first if this helps you get back to work easier and quicker. Try to stay active and remember to keep moving. Speak to your manager at work about any concerns you may have. You should try to do your normal activities as much as possible and use painkillers as needed. With regard to sports, start with light fitness training, and play when you feel ready.

Can my back problem cause trouble anywhere else?

Sometimes when you get back pain you can also get pain in one or both legs (sciatica). This can cause pins and needles or a shooting, stabbing pain to the legs. This can be very painful but this is common when you have back pain.

Do I need to see a doctor or a therapist?

Not usually – if you follow the right advice and take the right medication, your back problem should improve over the next 6 weeks. If your back symptoms are still interfering with your ability to do normal things after 6 weeks, this is the time to seek further professional advice from either your GP or NHS Physiotherapist.

If you experience any of the following in conjunction with your back pain, you need to contact NHS 111 as soon as possible:

- Difficulty passing or controlling urine
- Numbness and/or altered sensation such as pins and needles around your back passage or genitals, e.g. when wiping after toileting

If you experience any of the following in conjunction with your back pain, you need to speak to your doctor as soon as possible:

- Generally feeling unwell
- Back pain that starts when you have other problems, such as rheumatoid arthritis or cancer
- Numbness, pins and needles, or weakness in one or both legs that has not improved after one week
- Unsteadiness when you walk
- Your back problem has not improved within six weeks.

Facts and figures

- **90% of the UK population** get back pain at some point
- Most back pain **settles within six weeks**
- **Keeping active** is the best thing to help your back pain

Further information

- NHS Inform <http://m.nhsinform.co.uk/health-library/articles/b/back-pain/introduction>
- The truth about back pain - AXA PPP www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-cBtPSf0Hc
- NHS24 MSK help: useful exercises and advice - App for iPhone, Android
- 23 and ½ Hours <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F5Sly9JQao>

More information available on the North of England Regional Back Pain Programme web pages:

- <http://www.noebackpainprogramme.nhs.uk>