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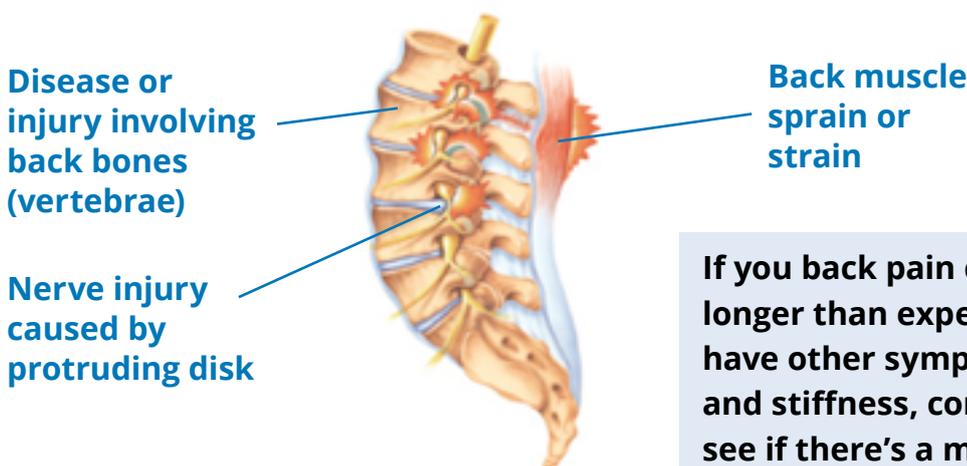
Back Pain

Covered in this fact sheet

| | |
|---|---|
| What is back pain? | 1 |
| Back pain and work | 2 |
| Top tips to help manage your back pain in the workplace | 2 |
| What are the symptoms of back pain? What causes back pain? | 3 |
| Talking to your GP or another health care provider about your back pain | 5 |
| Treatments for back pain | 5 |
| Some techniques to manage your back pain | 6 |
| Useful links | 9 |

What is back pain?

Back pain is a common problem, usually caused by a simple muscular strain from moving or twisting awkwardly and isn't usually a sign of a serious problem. Simple cases often improve within 4–6 weeks with treatment such as staying active, gentle exercise and over-the-counter pain relief if required for a short time. Staying active and getting on with normal activities is one of the best ways to deal with back pain.



If your back pain continues for longer than expected, or you may have other symptoms besides pain and stiffness, contact your GP to see if there's a more serious cause of your pain.

Back pain and work

Most of us may experience an episode of back pain at some time in our working lives. Staying active and getting on with normal activities is one of the best ways to deal with back pain. This includes staying in work. If your job is a very manual role then speak with your GP who will be able to advise on reducing certain activities of your role until the back pain has resolved.

People with chronic back pain (which doesn't resolve after 3 months) often make adaptations so they can keep working. Some choose to change the type of work they do, reduce their hours, or become self-employed. A change in duties, flexible arrangements which allow people to work in comfortable settings and pace activities can be helpful.

Top tip to help manage your back pain in the workplace

Travelling to work

Plan your route for getting to and from work, how to travel, the distance and the best time to travel. This may avoid spending time in rush hour traffic that can make your journey unnecessary longer. If you are a car driver you may be eligible for a Blue Parking badge, if not discuss with employee parking availability close to your place of work.

Take regular breaks

You may need to avoid sitting for too long and or standing for too long to manage your pain and stiffness in the joints. Getting up moving around or changing your posture. Find a balance between moving around and good postural positions.

Be realistic about what you can do

Avoiding activities which could cause discomfort and pain that lasts more than a couple of hours. Don't try to overdo

activities, let your line manager know as they may not be aware how you are feeling.

Practice techniques to manage your pain

There are many self techniques for managing pain that can be helpful when incorporated into your daily routine. Think about how these will work for you when planning your week i.e. gentle stretching before work and relaxation after work.

Relaxation

Relaxation skills could be helpful for reducing muscular tension and to unwind the mind. Techniques such as breathing techniques or doing something like reading a book, listening to music are helpful for many people.

Pace and plan activities

By pacing and planning at work this will allow you to schedule enough time to complete each task without feeling under pressure. Plan in regular breaks to change your position and posture.

Moving and handling

If your roles involves moving and handling ensure your training is up to date.

Supportive Equipment

Sometimes use of ergonomic equipment such as a mouse, keyboard, chair to support your posture or a standing desk can be helpful. Access to work will be able to offer you support in assessing what equipment may be beneficial.

Plan you annual leave

Plan you time off in advance thought out the year. A proper break will give you time to relax, connect with family and friends and take part in activities that you enjoy. This will help you to feel rejuvenated on your return to work.

Take advantage of employer's resources and benefits

Your workplace may offer free initiatives to support with your health and wellbeing. This may include Employee Assistance Program (EA) which can offer free confidential counselling or other support. Find out what is available to you.

What are the symptoms of back pain?

The symptoms of back pain can vary from person to person. Back pain may come on suddenly, with sudden awkward movement, lifting something heavy or from an injury or it may come on gradually over time. Pain may be felt anywhere along the spine from mild to server. Some people with back pain also have pain down one leg, or into the buttock or groin this is referred to a referred pain

The pain in your back can often feel is worse when you move, and better when you lie down. This may make it hard for you to carry out your usual day-to-day activities, and you may find it difficult to sleep well.

Very rarely, back pain may be accompanied by other symptoms:

- Difficulty controlling or passing urine
- Loss of control of your bowels
- Numbness around your back passage or your genitals
- Weakness in your legs or feeling unsteady on your feet
- Very severe ongoing pain that gets worse over several weeks.

These may be signs that the nerves at the bottom of your spine are being pressed on and you need to see / tell your GP immediately or NHS 111.

What causes back pain?

Many people develop back pain for no obvious reason, probably caused by a simple strain of the muscles, tendons or a sprain of the ligaments around your back but it's not usually due to a serious cause. Your GP is unlikely to be able to tell you exactly what's causing the pain. This type of back pain is described as non-specific back pain contributing factors include to non-specific back pain

- **Poor lifting techniques and moving and handling techniques**
- **Prolonged poor static postures**
- **Lack of exercise and the spine getting stiff and muscle weaker**

Some common conditions which affect your spine and can be the cause of back pain are referred to as specific back pain include:

- **Herniated disc** - When a disc bulges and puts pressure on your spinal nerves causing pain, tingling or numbness that can travel down the leg and foot
- **Spondylosis** - As we grow older the discs in the spine become thinner and the spaces between the vertebrae become narrower. This is called spondylosis and is very similar to the changes caused by osteoarthritis in other joints.
- **Fracture** - a crack or break in one of the bones in your back, perhaps due to osteoporosis

Back pain can also be caused by a **serious condition** such as an infection or cancer, but this is very uncommon.

Talking to your GP or another health care provider about your back pain

Back pain usually gets better on its own within a few weeks or months if you are keeping active and you may not need to see a doctor or other healthcare professional. If your pain does not start to improve after that time and it stop you doing your daily activities or is getting more severe than make an appointment to see your GP. Your GP, who will ask about your symptoms, examine your back, and discuss possible treatments. They may refer you to a physiotherapist for further help or a specialised doctor.

Treatment for back pain

Staying active and doing some exercise and taking pain killers for a short time is the most common things that help with back pain. Non-specific back pain is tends to get better with these activities. If you need more treatment this may include:

- Physiotherapy
- Prescribed medication
- Injections
- Surgery

But for some people pain might last for several weeks or even months and years, and this is called chronic back pain or persistent pain. Your GP will assess your suitability to be referred to a Pain Clinic to gain support with managing your back pain.

Managing your back pain

Building and creating a pain tool kit using different skills and tools can be helpful in successfully manage your osteoarthritis.



Be active

Exercise reduces the effect of weak muscles and stiff joints which you may experience if you have been less active due to your pain. Exercise might make your back feel a bit sore at first but it doesn't cause any harm – so don't let it put you off! Exercise also releases endorphins which boost your mood and help to reduce pain. Gentle exercise that starts to get your body moving and slowly and gradually is best initially.



Take notice

Be mindful. Mindfulness is a practice on focusing on what is happening “now” in the present moment. When you're mindful, you are aware of your thoughts without labelling them being good or

bad. Mindfulness helps us ask “Is this constant replaying the thoughts over and over in my head helpful or simply making me feel bad. Relaxation skills could be helpful for reducing muscular tension and to unwind the mind. Relaxation techniques such as breathing techniques or doing something like reading a book, listening to music are helpful for many people.



Keep learning: New hobbies

Having back pain can cause you to give up certain hobbies or activities. By learning new things we meet new people, skills which boosts self-confidence and makes us feel better. Some ideas can be learning a new word a week, a new language, arts and craft or joining a club to do these activities.



Connect; Reduce social isolation

Back pain can sometimes cause impacts on your relationships so much sure you stay in touch with friends and family - Phone a friend or family member and talk to them instead of sending a text and arrange to speak regularly. Relationships are so important for promoting wellbeing and making you feel good.



Give back

Doing something nice for someone will back you feel better about yourself and may help distract you from your pain. Try committing an act of kindness once a week; give someone a compliment or ask how someone how they are feel.



Pacing, Prioritising & Planning

Doing too much on your 'good' days, and less on your "bad days" is not an ideal for pain. Prioritise doing the things that really matter so you can plan and pace yourself.



Posture

Staying still in awkward positions while working or driving, for example will affect the soft tissues in your back's support structures and will increase your pain. Beware of your posture keep changing your posture regularly.



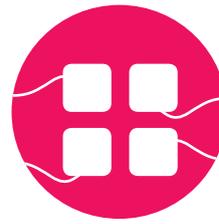
Sleep Hygiene

It may be difficult to get to sleep when you have pain. Sleep is so important for your health and well-being. Some tips are to remove any phone or screens the blue light is bad for your sleep. Have an aired room and create a relaxed atmosphere to sleep in.



Don't let your negative thoughts get the better of you

Pain can cause you to have a negative impact on your thoughts, feelings and emotions. Trying to learn to recognise when this is happening to your thought so that you can begin to challenge them and change them.



TENS

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (or TENS for short) aims to block pain messages to the brain and encourage the body to release the hormone endorphins. TENS machines are available on line or in pharmacies.



Watch your weight

Being overweight increases the strain on your joints especially in the lower back which are weight bearing joints. It also impacts on other joints hips and knees.

Useful links

Helplines



0300 123 0789
10am to 4pm every
Mon/Thurs/Friday



ARTHRITIS CARE
0808 800 4050

**Action on
pain!**

0345 6031593
www.action-on-pain.co.uk

Arthritis
Research

0800 5200520