



Acute low back pain

You came to the emergency department with pain in your lower back. The doctor examined you and found no sign of a serious cause today. This sheet explains how to look after your back at home.

What is it?

Most sudden back pain comes from a strained muscle, ligament or joint in the back. It can be very painful, but it is rarely serious. Scans are usually not needed. Most people feel much better within a few weeks. Staying gently active helps you recover faster than resting in bed.

Looking after yourself at home

- Keep moving gently. Walk a little several times a day and slowly do more as the pain allows.
- Avoid bed rest. Lying down for long periods can make the stiffness and pain worse.
- Try a warm pack or a warm shower on your back for 15 to 20 minutes to ease the muscles.
- Avoid heavy lifting and twisting for a few days. Bend your knees, not your back, when you pick things up.
- Change position often. Do not sit or stand in one place for too long.
- Go back to work and normal activities as soon as you can, even if you still have some pain.

Medicines

- Paracetamol can help the pain, unless your doctor told you not to. Follow the packet or your doctor's instructions.
- Ibuprofen may help too, unless your doctor said no. Avoid it if you have a stomach ulcer, kidney disease, some asthma, or are pregnant.
- If you were given a stronger pain medicine, use it only for a few days. It can make you drowsy and constipated.

Follow-up

- See your family doctor or health centre if the pain is not improving after 1 to 2 weeks.
- Your doctor may suggest physiotherapy or exercises to strengthen your back.

Come back to the emergency department or call an ambulance straight away if:

- Weakness or numbness in one or both legs
- Loss of control over urine or stool
- Back pain with fever or chills
- Severe pain after a fall or accident
- New numbness around your bottom, genitals or inner thighs



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This leaflet is general information to support the advice your doctor or nurse gave you today. It does not replace their advice. If you are worried, seek medical help.

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