



Lower Back Pain

Patient information leaflet



GIG
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Common Ailments Service

Only use this leaflet if your pharmacist has advised you about your condition.

Lower back pain is common and normally gets better within a few weeks. Sometimes it comes back.

It is often not possible to identify the cause of back pain. In many cases, an injury such as a sprain or a strain is the cause. In others, there may be a problem with the nerves or discs between the bones in the spine.



Treatment and Prevention

To ease back pain at home:

- try to keep active - go about your daily activities as normally as possible
- use an ice pack (or bag of frozen peas) wrapped in a tea towel to reduce pain and swelling
- use a heat pack (or hot water bottle) wrapped in a tea towel to relieve joint stiffness or muscle spasms

Your pharmacist may suggest you try doing some back pain exercises and stretches. You could ask a physiotherapist to suggest suitable exercises or there are exercises for back pain on the websites www.backcare.org.uk and www.csp.org.uk/conditions/back-pain/video-exercises-back-pain.

Medicines that can help

These medicines are not suitable for everyone. Make sure you have asked your pharmacist for advice about what treatment is best for you.

Ibuprofen and **naproxen** are painkillers that help with inflammation and come as tablets. Always take the tablets with, or just after food.

If you take them for a long time, ibuprofen and naproxen can sometimes cause a stomach ulcer. Your pharmacist may recommend that you also take a proton pump inhibitor (PPI) such as **lansoprazole** or **omeprazole**. The PPI helps to prevent stomach ulcers by reducing the acid in your stomach. Take the PPI for as long as you take ibuprofen or naproxen.

Ibuprofen also comes as a gel that can be rubbed into the skin where you feel the pain. The gel is less likely to cause side effects than tablets.

If your pharmacist has advised you to use the gel:

- only put it on the affected areas of your back - avoid your eyes, mouth and broken skin
- wash your hands after each application
- do not smoke and keep away from unprotected flames- some gels have ingredients that can easily catch fire

If you need more pain relief, you can take **paracetamol** tablets along with ibuprofen or naproxen. Paracetamol on its own may not ease your back pain.



Treatment and Prevention

Always read the patient information leaflet that comes with your medicine.

If you are concerned about any side effects from a treatment, report it to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist. You can also report side effects on the Yellow Card [app](#) or [website](#).

Prevention

Preventing back pain is difficult, but it can help to:

- do regular back exercises and stretches
- stay active - try to exercise for 150 minutes each week
- avoid sitting for too long when driving or at work
- take care when lifting
- check your posture when sitting, using computers and watching television – poor posture sometimes leads to back pain
- ensure the mattress on your bed supports you properly
- lose weight, if you're overweight – [free NHS help is available](#)
- take part in activities you find relaxing - some people find yoga, meditation or exercise help with stress and anxiety



When to Get Help

Contact your GP if:

- you have treated your back pain for 3 to 4 weeks and it is not better
- the pain is stopping you from going about your daily activities as usual
- the pain is severe or getting worse
- you are worried about the pain or are struggling to cope
- you have a weakened immune system, for example from cancer treatment or steroid therapy

Urgently contact your GP or call 111 if you have back pain and:

- sudden, severe pain down your spine
- sexual problems that you have not experienced before
- a lump or swelling on your back or if your back has changed shape
- a temperature of over 38°C or you feel unwell
- you have lost weight without trying to
- your pain does not go away when you rest or is worse at night
- your pain is worse when sneezing, coughing or pooing
- your pain is coming from the top of your back (between your shoulders), rather than your lower back
- you are taking ibuprofen or naproxen and think you may have symptoms of a stomach ulcer

Very rarely, back pain can be a sign of a more serious problem.

Call 999 or go to A&E if you have:

- pain, tingling or weakness down your legs
- numbness down your legs or around your bottom or genitals
- problems with being able to pee or poo, or not being able to make it to the toilet in time
- pain in your chest

If you are worried that your condition is not getting better, or is getting worse, talk to your GP.



More information

For more information on back pain or a medicine, talk to your pharmacist or look at the following websites:

Backcare: www.backcare.org.uk

Start Back: <https://startback.hfac.keele.ac.uk/patients/>

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy: <https://www.csp.org.uk/conditions/managing-pain-home/managing-your-back-pain>

NHS 111 Wales: <https://111.wales.nhs.uk/Backpain/>

Medicines A-Z: <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/>

Information from the above resources is included in this leaflet.



Mae'r daflen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This leaflet is also available in Welsh.

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