

## Physiotherapy Department

# Advice for patients with persistent back pain

### General Advice

- Back pain is very common.
- Even when it hurts it doesn't mean you are doing harm to yourself.
- Being active is much better for you than resting in bed.
- It often gets better with little or no medical treatment

### Recovery from back pain

Most cases of back pain will resolve within a few weeks of onset with simple exercises and remaining active. However, in some cases pain can persist for longer than this. This does not mean your back has not healed. In most cases it is due to a reduction in strength and flexibility. Other factors that can contribute to persisting low back are:

- Reduced physical activity levels
- Poor diet
- Stress
- Poor sleep pattern or quality
- Low mood
- Being fearful of movement
- Having low confidence of how to self-manage

In cases where the above factors may be contributing to ongoing low back pain it is important to take a holistic approach with the help of your therapist.



### **Consider these:**

#### **Return to your normal activities**

Having a healthy social life and returning to all of your normal activities and hobbies has been shown to improve outcomes in people with persistent back pain.

#### **Exercise**

Perform exercise that you find meaningful and enjoyable. Strengthening and cardiovascular exercises have both been shown to be effective at reducing back pain as well as improving disc health. Your physiotherapist will also give you exercises specific to your symptoms.

#### **Improve sleep quality**

Having a bad night's sleep can make you feel more pain sensitive. Pain and sleep are closely linked and impact each other. The latest findings point to poor sleep effecting pain levels greater than the other way round. Good quality sleep has been shown to reduce pain sensitivity so it is important to try and give yourself the best chance of having a good night's sleep. For more information, look into "improving sleep hygiene".

#### **Relaxation and stress management**

When we get stressed the body naturally releases certain hormones. This is okay for short periods of time, however when we are stressed most of the time it can have a negative effect on our health. This can include a reduced pain threshold, spinal muscle spasm and loss of muscle mass. It is therefore important we manage stress levels. This can be done through regular exercise, relaxed breathing techniques, mindfulness or meditation. It is important to find what works for you.

#### **Healthy balanced diet**

Some people's persistent back pain can be influenced by chronic inflammation in the body. Certain foods can increase or decrease levels of inflammation in the body. Eating a healthy balanced diet can reduce levels of inflammation. A 'Mediterranean diet' would be an example of this. For more guidance speak to a dietician or nutritionist.

# Patient Information

## Take home message

- The cause of persistent back pain has many contributing factors
- To improve your situation you need to address the factors that drive your back pain
- Reassure yourself there is nothing seriously wrong
- Continue your normal hobbies and activities as you feel you can
- Live a healthy active lifestyle

## Contact Details

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