

What else can I do to help my pain?

- Stress and tension can make your pain feel worse
- It is natural to worry about your back. This worry can cause more tension in your back. This leads to more pain
- Remember, hurt does not mean harm or damage.

Try to do something that helps you relax.
For example, imagine something calm; listen to music.

Try this exercise to help back tension and pain.



Find a comfortable position.
Focus on your breathing.
Slow and steady breathing.
“Let go” of tension as you breathe out.

This can take 10-15 minutes.

When should I seek help?

These are *very rare* symptoms. Contact a doctor if you have any of:

- Recent difficulty passing or controlling urine
- A change in sensation around your back passage or genitals
- Numbness, pins and needles, or weakness in both legs
- Recent unsteadiness on your feet
- Severe pain that gets *worse* over several weeks
- You are unwell with your back pain.

References:

www.scottishbacks.co.uk

www.tso.co.uk -“The Back Book”

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This leaflet was compiled by Edinburgh Community Physiotherapy Service in conjunction with the Patient Information Leaflet Group, NHS Lothian Physiotherapy Services

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Back pain, with leg pain



A guide for patients

Most back pain, with leg pain, settles with time.

Often the leg pain feels worse than the back pain.

There is a lot you can do to help yourself.

Serious or permanent damage is rare.

At first, you may need to rest more, or change how you do things.

See www.scottishbacks.co.uk for more advice

What are the facts?

- Most back pain, with leg pain, settles with time. Acute pain improves in few days or weeks
- Often the leg pain feels worse than the back pain
- Pain can last for a long time, or may come and go
- Back pain is rarely due to serious disease or damage. Even minor back strains can be very painful

Do I need an x-ray or a scan?

No, it is very unlikely that you will need these. They may be misleading when words like 'degeneration' are used. Degeneration is normal with age – just like wrinkles or grey hair. Tests will be arranged only if necessary

Should I take pain-killers or anti-inflammatories?



Yes, you should take medication regularly, as prescribed. Your GP (or a pharmacist), can advise you which medication may be best for you. Early medication can help your recovery.

Should I use heat or cold?



Yes, a heat pad, or cold pack, can help give you relief for a while. Leave it on for up to 10-20 minutes. Test which one works better for you. If you use a cold pack, remember to put a damp tea towel around it to protect your skin.

You will have good and bad days – that's normal.

Try to stop yourself from over-doing-it on a "good day" – this can help speed up your recovery

Should I keep moving? Should I rest?

- ✓ Keeping moving helps you recover.
- ✓ Staying active keeps your joints mobile and your muscles strong.
- ✓ The spine is very strong.
- ✓ Try to stay active, but respect the pain in your leg.
- ✓ You may need to reduce your activities and rest more if your pain is very severe.
- ✓ Experiment with different resting positions – try to find a position that reduces your leg pain
- ☒ Bed rest is not a treatment. It can make your back and legs weaker. You should be up-and-about by two weeks at the latest, even if you still have some pain. Contact your doctor if you cannot manage this.
- ☒ If you rest too much, your back will quickly get out of condition. Try to get up for short periods.
- ☒ Don't try to beat the pain in your leg by keeping doing something that makes it worse. Change your position, and change activity – see if that helps.

What can I do to help my back and leg?

- ✓ Experiment with different resting positions – try to find a position that reduces your leg pain.
- ✓ You may lie down if the pain is severe. Try to get up for short periods and gradually increase the time you are up for.
- ✓ Gentle walking and swimming (vary the strokes). Build up slowly.
- ✓ If you do have to limit some of your activities, try to build them back into your life over a few days or weeks.
- ✓ Consider the things that make your pain worse. Think about the postures that make your pain better. Use this knowledge to help control your pain.



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