



Caring for your low back pain

The best person to manage your injury is you and this fact sheet discusses things you can do to get better more quickly.

Acute low back pain usually lasts for a short time (less than three months). Nearly 80% of Australians will experience back pain at some stage in their lives. Fortunately, most people who suffer from back pain will get better within a few days or weeks.

If you are not sure what you can and can't do, speak with your health provider.

Please note smoking, alcohol or other illicit substances do not assist your recovery.

Managing your pain

- For soft tissue injuries, you can expect your pain to settle down over a short period of time (days to weeks) as healing occurs.
- Using your back as normally as possible will help you get better. So, even though you may be in some pain, try to stay active.
- Pacing your activities can help, so have regular rest breaks and modify activity within pain levels.
- If you need pain relief, a short course of medication such as paracetamol may help, otherwise you can consult your doctor or pharmacist for the appropriate type of pain relieving medication.
- If you're worried about your pain or it is not settling quickly, talk to your health provider.

Resuming daily activities

- It helps if you try to get back to your usual daily activities as soon as possible, unless your health provider advises otherwise.
- Prolonged bed-rest delays recovery, and is not recommended.
- Regular activity such as walking or swimming will get your joints and muscles moving. Any usual exercise, as tolerated, is helpful and will assist your recovery.
- Increase your activities steadily and in stages. Set yourself goals that can be achieved over a week such as doing the housework, going out, doing gentle exercises and enjoying hobbies.
- Spread your activities throughout the day, and take time to rest between activities.
- Alternate easier activities with more physically demanding activities.
- Remember it is normal to have good days and not so good days.

Ways to manage your symptoms

- Sit in an upright chair with low back support rather than a low, soft lounge chair.
- When driving adjust the back of your car-seat to be almost upright and minimise twisting to get in and out of the car.
- When shopping, lighten the load by breaking it into several trips and only lift shopping from a comfortable height such as the back seat.
- For all tasks and other activities:
 - > When vacuuming, sweeping or mopping, use short strokes and move your feet rather than bending and twisting.
 - > When making the bed, kneel down to tuck in the sheets.
 - > If you can, position the bed away from the wall to make bed-making easier.
 - > Kneel on one knee to reach things at low levels.
 - > Push things rather than pulling them, and keep your elbows close to your body.
 - > Ensure your work surface is at a comfortable height.
- Sit, stand, walk. Change your position regularly.
- Wear comfortable shoes with low heels.
- Sleep on a firm mattress and if you sleep on your back, try placing a pillow under your knees. If you sleep on your side, you can put a pillow between your knees instead.
- Do things that help you relax, such as walking or listening to music.

When to seek more help

Talk to your health provider if:

- your symptoms significantly worsen or new symptoms develop
- you don't have any improvement after one week

- you develop numbness or tingling in your legs
- if you have bowel or bladder problems
- you have concerns about your low back injury

Staying positive

- If you have a positive outlook, and expect that you will get better, this can help you achieve a faster recovery.
- Concentrate on things you can do, instead of things you can't.
- It is important that you stay in charge of your life and to remember most people recover quickly.
- If you become upset about your injury, it may help if you speak with a friend, family member or health provider.
- Keeping fit and healthy will help your injury heal.

Helping yourself at work

- Research shows that the sooner you resume all your usual activities, including work (either paid or unpaid) the sooner you'll get better, and the less likely it is that your injury will become a long term problem.
- Your health provider may recommend that you do different tasks from usual at work while you get better.
- Talk with your employer and health provider about ways you can return to work safely.
- Depending on your circumstances, an occupational therapist, physiotherapist, rehabilitation provider or other health provider may assist you to modify your work tasks for a safe return to work.
- Allow for regular changes in body position and movement, to minimise stiffness.
- Keep in touch with your workmates and your workplace. Participate in social activities. This can help you stay in touch with what's going on at work.

Remember you don't have to be completely pain free to do things at home or to return to work.

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