

# Long-standing Lower Back Pain

## Information for Patients



**This leaflet has been written to give you the right information about lower back pain and what you can do to help with your recovery.**

### What is long-standing lower back pain?

Lower back pain can affect anyone regardless of age, gender or work role. Most episodes of back pain will settle after a few weeks. Unfortunately, some people may find that their pain doesn't settle after 6-8 weeks and tends to last longer. The term long-standing back pain is related to pain that lasts longer than 3 months.

### What causes back pain?

In some cases, lower back pain can follow something easily identifiable, like a twist or picking something up, however sometimes it just seems to come out of the blue for no obvious reason. In the case of long-standing lower back pain, it is normal to find that your pain may come and go over time with episodes where you feel ok and also episodes where it can be a challenge.

Your lower back is unbelievably strong and robust, therefore it is very difficult to damage. This doesn't mean that it can't be sore from time to time, but most long-standing lower back complaints have nothing to do with any damage - even the really sore ones.

### What are the common symptoms?

**Pain:** In most cases, the discomfort will stay in the lower back region, but for some people the pain may move down the leg or possibly towards your upper back or stomach.

**Stiffness:** It is very common to find the muscles around your lower back may be working harder than normal and you might find them difficult to relax, possibly making movement difficult.

**Worry:** Pain can often make you feel vulnerable and can be concerning, especially if it is new and/ or is affecting your normal everyday life. The impact of back pain can also cause people extra concern as often gets in the way of things you would normally easily do.

## What can I do to help myself?

**Calm it down:** Often the best place to start with any painful complaint is to try and calm it down. In a lot of cases there will be things your back likes to do and some that it is less happy to do. Calming it down simply means looking at the things it doesn't like and trying to make some adjustments or changes to make it easier for yourself.

For example, you might find that getting out of bed in the morning or bending forwards are uncomfortable. You might find that doing some simple exercises before getting up or relaxing and breathing normally as you bend forwards can help whilst your back is unhappy.

**Be kind to yourself:** Back pain can make you feel vulnerable, drained and sometimes a bit lost. Your body is amazing and can sort most issues out by itself but sometimes it needs some help. By adapting and adjusting things that are sore, you are not giving into the problem, but instead, working with it.

**Build it back up again:** Movement is medicine for your body, and your back is no different. Calming the issue down (as described above) is often the best place to start and sometimes this might take a few weeks to help. Once your back feels a little calmer, it is a good idea to start to 'build it back up again'. What this means is that once the back is able to tolerate some gentle exercise, then it is worth starting some.

## Is there anything that I should look out for?

Most low back pain is caused by an irritation of certain structures around your lumbar spine region, however it is very important to be aware of certain symptoms that are less common with back pain and what you should do if you have any:

- New (within the last 2 weeks) altered bladder function (difficulty starting, stopping, maintaining a wee or even knowing that you need to go).
- New (within the last 2 weeks) altered bowel function (incontinence or leaking or not knowing when your bowel is full).
- New (within the last 2 weeks) altered sensation around your genitals, anus or inner thighs (a change in the feeling or ability to feel temperature around where you would sit on a bike or horse saddle).
- New (within the last 2 weeks) difficulty coordinating your legs/rapid loss of leg strength ('jelly-legs' or that your legs won't go where you want them to)
- New (within the last 2 weeks) altered sexual function (men: unable to achieve an erection or ejaculate; women: altered feeling during penetrative or oral sex)
- New (within the last 2 weeks) pain going into both legs.

**If you suddenly develop any or a combination of the symptoms listed above, you may need urgent medical attention and should attend A&E as soon as you can.**

You can find this information in different languages by searching online for: **MACP CES card**

A short, animated video about this information can be found by searching online for: **MACP CES video.**

### **Is there anything else I should be looking out for?**

The list above are the things that are most important for you to be aware of if you are dealing with back pain. However, there are a few other things that you should be aware of that are not dangerous, damaging or worrying, but might just mean that a different type of treatment will suit you better.

Along with your back pain, if you have any of the following symptoms (or more than one), you should discuss them with your physiotherapist or GP:

- Having a temperature or fever alongside your lower back pain.
- Inability to lie flat due to your back pain.
- A history of cancer and/or loss of weight alongside your lower back pain.

### **Will it get better?**

For most people, backpain will not be a pleasant experience but reassuringly, it does have the potential to get better. By understanding the issue as best you can and by adjusting what is sore to then allow you to explore some exercise/s, is often the best formula for success.

If you would like to know more about back pain or find a greater choice of exercises, you can explore our dedicated webpage.

Search online: [Norfolk and Waveney MSK services](#) 'longstanding lower back pain'

## Exercises



On the bed. With one or both legs, bring your knees to your chest and allow your back to round. Continue to breathe normally and allow your back to round.

Complete little and often throughout the day.



On the bed. With your knees together, roll them to one side as far as is comfortable and repeat to the other side. Continue to breathe normally.

Aim to work until your legs tire. Complete little and often throughout the day.



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