

Take care when lifting and twisting. Hold objects close to your body and try not to lift heavy objects from the floor. Try and sit with a straight back in well supported chairs. Slouching will put more strain on your back.

When is my condition likely to settle?

- Most non-specific back pains ease and go quickly, usually within a week or two.
- In about 7 in 10 cases, the pain has either gone or has greatly eased within four weeks.
- In about 9 in 10 cases the pain has gone or has greatly eased within six weeks.

If pain persists, contact your GP.

If you develop significant leg pain (in particular pain down both legs), changes of sensation in the part of your body between your genital region and bottom, or any change in your bowel or bladder function, you must go immediately to your closest Emergency Department for assessment.

Further information

More information can be found at:
<http://patient.info/health/nonspecific-lower-back-pain-in-adults>

Contact Details

If you have any questions please telephone the RUH Emergency Department on

01225 824000 (day)
01225 825015 (night)

Royal United Hospitals Bath
NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG
01225 428331 www.ruh.nhs.uk

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital.

Email ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net
or telephone 01225 825656.

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Back Pain



Back Pain

Back pain is very common and can be very painful. About 8 out of 10 people will have one or more bouts of low back pain. In most cases it is not due to serious disease and often the exact cause is not clear. This is called non-specific lower back pain.

There are generally two reasons that people come to hospital with back pain. The first is for pain relief when simple painkillers like paracetamol, ibuprofen and codeine have not helped. The second is to be assessed for whether further tests are needed.

What is sciatica?

Sciatica describes the symptoms of pain usually down the backs of the legs or towards your feet that results from the nerves being pressed on as they travel out of your spine. It is usually caused by a 'slipped disc' pressing on these nerves.

The majority settle within 6-8 weeks without specific treatment or tests. If the problem persists beyond this time you may be referred for further tests e.g. an MRI or to a specialist.

Do I need any more tests today?

An X Ray of your lower back (lumbar spine) is only needed in rare circumstances such as physical injury.

Rarely an urgent MRI is needed. Your doctor will ask you questions and examine you to see if this is needed. Sometimes an emergency MRI is not needed but the doctor may recommend that your GP request an MRI as an outpatient within 24-48 hours.

Do I need an operation?

No. Operations for non-specific low back pain are a last option to be considered only after a prolonged period of other treatments. This is because they can be risky and cannot guarantee improvements.

The majority of acute back pain episodes will settle within a period of weeks.

What can I do to help myself?

Pain relief is the best treatment to aid recovery. You can do this initially with paracetamol and an anti-inflammatory tablet such as ibuprofen.

Stronger painkillers may be necessary. Sometimes muscle relaxants are prescribed short term. You are likely to continue to have some pain; Painkillers will help ease the pain, to allow movement, but we will rarely (if ever) be able to get rid of the pain completely until it settles over time.

A cold pack or heat pack (e.g. hot water bottle) can be another way of helping pain.

Bed rest should be for a maximum of 48 hours.

Staying physically active, even though this may result in some discomfort, is important. You should resume normal activities as soon as possible.

If you have a job, aim to get back to work as soon as possible. There is no need to wait for complete freedom from pain before returning to work. Returning to work often helps relieve pain by getting back to a normal pattern of activity and providing a distraction from the pain.