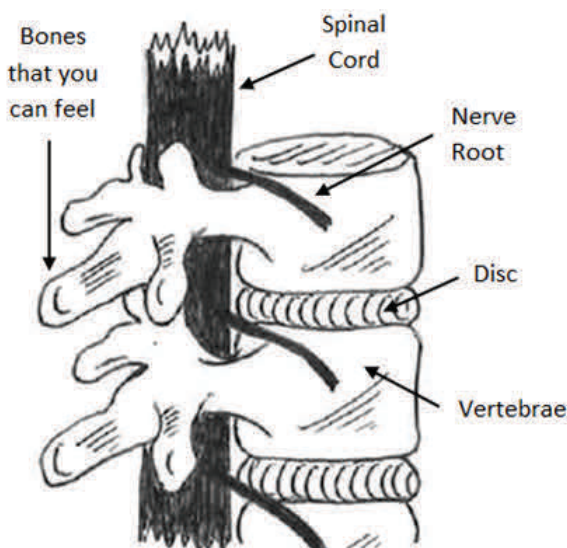


# Acute Low Back Pain

## Understanding Low Back Pain

Low back pain is very common with 80-90% of people getting it in their lives. Back pain is usually short term and most people make an excellent recovery within 1-2 months.

The back is made up of the spinal cord and its branches (nerve roots) which are protected by relatively small bones (vertebrae). Most of the support is provided by the surrounding muscles and ligaments (not in the diagram). All of these structures have to work together to allow you to move.



A cause for your back pain will often not be able to be found - even with imaging such as CT or MRI. Most patients (85%) are diagnosed with "non-specific lower back pain" meaning no definite structure can be identified as the cause of the pain.

Rest assured that as long as the serious causes have been excluded by your doctor (and these are not common), the *exact* cause of the pain is not required to effectively treat your back.

## Tips for a Rapid Recovery

The most important thing you can do is to stay active. Don't be afraid that you will damage your back if you move it. In fact, research has shown that too much bed rest will slow down your recovery.

- If your back pain is severe, bed rest may be needed, but not for more than a day.
- Avoid high impact activities but you should start light activities as soon as you can.
- Try to do most of the normal things you do at work and at home. Some tasks that involve very heavy lifting or twisting may need to be modified.
- Take the pain medications as prescribed by your doctor. This will allow you to move about more easily. At night time you may find applying heat packs soothing.
- Remember that pain does not necessarily mean you are causing damage.
- Posture is very important. When you are sitting or standing, have your shoulders relaxed back and you should feel tall. Good posture allows your muscles and joints to work effectively.
- Avoid long periods of sitting or standing. Regularly change position and stretch often.

The following will put you at increased risk for having your back pain recur:

- Smoking - Just quit... Do it today!
- Being overweight - this puts unnecessary stress on your spine.
- Lack of exercise and a sedentary lifestyle - the muscles and structures that support your spine degenerate, get weak and your back will suffer.

**Making just a small change to your diet and lifestyle will make a huge difference on *your* future and the future of your back pain.**

## Exercises

Once your symptoms start to settle and resolve, you should consider starting some gentle stretching exercises to aid your recovery. Some suggestions have been provided for you over the page.

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**If at any point during the exercises, the pain unexpectedly gets worse or moves from your back down into your legs, stop that exercise and try the next one.**

## Exercise 1. Gentle Rock

Lie on your back with your knees bent up. Gently rock your knees from side to side. Start with small movements and slowly build up the movement. Do this for 2 minutes.



## Exercise 2. Single Knee to chest

Lie on your back with your knees bent up. Slowly bend your hips one leg at a time so your knee moves towards your chest. Lower your hip back to the start and bend the other hip up. This can be progressed to bending both legs at the same time if it doesn't hurt you. Hold each position for 10 seconds. Do this 5 times initially.



## Exercise 3. Lower Trunk Rotation

Keeping your back flat, knees bent and your feet together, rotate your knees to the left side and hold it for 3secs. Repeat 5 times initially. Then do the same on the right side.



## Exercise 4. Pelvic Tilt

Flatten your lower back by pushing it down towards the floor and tightening your tummy muscles and buttocks for 5secs. Repeat this 5 times initially.



## Exercise 5. The Bridge

Lie flat on back; bend knees at 90-degree angle, feet flat on floor. Tighten your tummy muscles and keep them tight while you raise buttocks off floor. Tighten your buttocks. Shoulder to knees should be in straight line. Hold for a count of 5secs. Slowly lower buttocks to floor. Repeat five to fifteen times.



## Exercise 6. Walking

Try going for a gentle 10 minute walk everyday. Over time you can slowly increase the time and intensity.

Exercise will stretch your lower back and help the muscle spasms. You should initially aim to do these exercises a few times a day, increasing the frequency as tolerated. Over time the exercise should focus on strengthening your tummy and pelvic floor muscles to support your back. Pilates, yoga and swimming can also help.

**Seek urgent medical attention if you develop:** Any weakness in your leg(s) or problems with bladder or bowel function.

See your doctor in one week. Take your pain medications as prescribed:

## Seeking help:



In a medical emergency go to your nearest emergency department or call 911.