# Lower back pain

Staying active and recognising warning signs



**Many episodes improve over a few weeks. Recovery usually involves gradual movement and a plan suited to your symptoms.**

## Help your recovery

- Keep gently active and continue manageable daily tasks. Short walks and regular changes of position may be easier than one long activity.
- Avoid prolonged bed rest. Build activity gradually and discuss work adjustments if lifting or prolonged sitting is difficult.
- A wrapped heat or cold pack may help. Protect your skin and avoid burns. Ask a clinician or pharmacist which pain relief is safe for you.

## Exercises and treatment

- Use exercises appropriate to your condition. Stop and seek advice if exercise causes worsening pain or new neurological symptoms.
- An examination helps decide whether physiotherapy, medication or investigation is needed. Do not assume a scan is always required.

## Arrange a review

- Seek prompt advice if pain is severe or worsening quickly, or you have fever, feel unwell, have unexplained weight loss or persistent night pain.
- Book review if pain is not improving over a few weeks, prevents normal activities or is difficult to cope with. Tell the clinician about cancer, osteoporosis, steroid treatment or recent injury.

### Go to emergency care now

New difficulty passing urine, loss of bladder or bowel control, numbness around the genitals or bottom, or weakness/numbness affecting both legs needs urgent emergency assessment. Call 112 if you cannot travel safely or there is collapse or chest pain.

# My recovery plan

Lower back pain

Aim for steady progress rather than complete rest until all pain disappears.

Tell your clinician about new symptoms rather than simply increasing pain medicine.

**Symptoms and when they started**

**Activities I can continue**

**Work or lifting adjustments**

**Exercises agreed with clinician / physiotherapist**

**Pain-relief instructions**

**Review date and warning signs discussed**

**Questions or notes for my appointment**

## Sources and further reading

NHS: back pain
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/

Cambridge University Hospitals: back pain
https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/patient-information/back-pain/

General information. Follow your individual clinical plan. Sources checked 31 October 2026; review due October 2027.