

# SOUTHPORT PHYSIOTHERAPY CENTRE

3E/34 High Street, Southport QLD 4215 P: (07) 5591 4333 E: southportphysio@gmail.com

## BACK PAIN AND HOW TO MANAGE IT

Back pain is very common and often improves over a few days or weeks. What's more, back pain is often not due to serious disease or damage.

- Your spine is one of the strongest parts of the body and is surprisingly difficult to damage.
- The amount of pain experienced may not be related to the degree of damage. (Think of a paper cut- small injury but unexpectedly irritating pain)
- With appropriate education, support and treatment, most people can manage their own back pain.
- Maintaining and then gradually increasing your daily activity can allow you to recover sooner.



### Find out what is happening.

Consult a health professional. The vast majority of back pain is due to soft tissue injury (eg muscle or ligament strain)

X-rays can be effective in demonstrating arthritis and bony deformity or fracture but do not show soft tissue and therefore often provide limited (if any) assistance in determining damage or cause of the back pain.

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## What can you do to manage the pain?

### Stay active/keep moving.

- Your pain might make it more difficult to do normal activities, but we now know that maintaining and gradually increasing your daily activity can help you to recover sooner.
- Moving your back may hurt but this does not mean you are causing more damage. Try to remember that '***hurt is not always the same as harm***'. However, you should never do anything that knowingly aggravates your pain.
- You may have to take things a little easier at first and gradually build up over a few days or weeks.
- Try not to stop your normal activities, but change the way you go about doing them.

### Avoid prolonged bed rest.

- Bed rest is not a treatment and can actually make you worse. By not moving your muscles and joints can become weak and stiff, and you can lose general fitness and conditioning.
- Don't overdo it but try to avoid long periods of inactivity.

### Medication

- Taking regular pain relief such as paracetamol is useful if it allows you to remain active.
- Don't wait until the pain becomes too great. If your pain is severe, talk to your doctor about suitable pain relief.
- Medication will not increase your risk of damaging your back by masking your body's warning signals.

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## **Heat/Cold therapy**

Either can be effective- you may need to trial which works better for you.

- Heat therapy can be in the form of heat wheats, warm shower or bath, heat packs or thermal rubs. It is important for the temperature to be comfortable warmth and never hot.
- Cold therapy can be in the form of ice, cold packs or cold rubs.

Be careful not to cause a heat or ice burn.

## **Exercise and Fitness**

- Regular exercise helps to keep you and your back fit and healthy. However, some exercises may not be suitable and may aggravate back pain. Ask your physiotherapist for advice regarding the best exercises to perform.

- It is important that you find an activity that you enjoy and that benefits you.

This will help you to stay active long after you have recovered.

## **Change lifestyle factors.**

- Check for everyday things that may be aggravating your back pain, such as repetitive or uncomfortable postures at work or at home.
- Experiment with different chairs, positions and seat adjustments.
- Consider what postures make you feel better and use this awareness to help manage your pain.
- Try to not stay in one position for more than 20 minutes at a time. Subtle changes to posture and positioning can be effective in keeping the pain at bay.

## **Diet and lifestyle.**

- Smoking has been shown to prolong recovery. Consider getting help to quit
- Eat a healthy diet and aim for a healthy weight. This can reduce the physical stress/load upon your back.

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## **Reduce stress and tension.**

- Continued stress about injuring your back can potentially lead to more pain and/or tension.
- You can't always remove the cause of stress, but you can learn strategies to reduce how it affects you. In turn this may help reduce your pain.
- Try to do something that helps you relax, such as listening to music, imagining something calm.
- You can train yourself to be calm - *the more you practice, the better you get at it.*

## **Coping or avoiding.**

How you think about your pain can affect your recovery.

This is good news- you can 'change your mind' about how you manage and recover.

People can often be described as either *avoiders or copers* in how they think about and manage their pain.

### **Avoiders:**

- Fear their path and worry about the future
- Think that pain means damage
- Rest and wait for someone else to fix the problem.

### **Copers:**

- Focus on getting better
- Carry on living as normally as possible
- Stay positive and active.
- Believe they can help themselves.

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## **Things to remember:**

*The back is strong and designed to move.*

*Serious or permanent damage is rare.*

*Hurt does not mean harm or damage.*

*Most back pain settles with time.*

*There are lots of things you can do to help.*

*Maintaining and gradually increasing daily activity and fitness  
can often help you recover sooner.*

