

Compliments, comments & complaints

If you'd like to compliment, comment or complain about our service please contact our Customer Services Department:

Customer Services Department

Livewell Southwest
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Tel: 01752 435201

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Contact details

The Minor Injuries Units are open every day of the year, including Bank Holidays.

Minor Injuries Unit Cumberland Centre

Damerel Close
Plymouth
PL1 4JZ

Tel: 01752 434390

Opening times: 8:30am - 9pm

Minor Injuries Unit South Hams Hospital

Plymouth Road
Kingsbridge
TQ7 1AT

Tel: 01548 852349

Opening times: 9am - 5pm

Minor Injuries Unit Tavistock Hospital

Spring Hill
Tavistock
PL19 8LD

Tel: 01822 612233

Opening times: 8am - 10pm

www.livewellsouthwest.co.uk



Livewell Southwest



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Back Pain Advice Leaflet



Minor Injuries Unit

Cumberland Centre
South Hams Hospital
Tavistock Hospital

Introduction

Back pain is very common with about 80% of people affected during their lifetime. Most cases get better without immediate treatment.

Your back is made up of muscles, strong ligaments and tendons which attach to your spine. The spine is made up of vertebrae with cartilage discs in between each one. The spine carries your spinal cord and nerves. Your back gives support for your body and allows flexibility and movement.

What is the cause of back pain?

Most back pain causes are non-specific and are usually due to a mechanical problem with the muscles or ligaments such as a sprain, wear and tear, or poor posture.

Most back pain will improve within a few weeks as the tissues heal. Some people may go on to develop 'chronic back pain' if it lasts for more than three months. This is often due to the nerves being more sensitive to different movements or the muscles not being strong enough to cope with daily loads. This is very common. It does not need urgent medical attention. A physiotherapist can help you strengthen the muscles and improve your mobility.

What tests do you need?

In most cases you will not need any x-ray or further tests. A full clinical examination carried out by the nurse practitioner or your own GP is much more accurate at diagnosing your problem.

The majority of x-rays / tests are negative and will not quicken your recovery. Current UK guidelines state that x-rays and MRI scans should not be carried out for normal back pain.

How can you treat your acute back pain?

Self help measures are the initial treatment for most back pain.

Keep active and continue daily activities as much as possible. Gentle exercise increases blood flow to the tissues and promotes healing. Bed rest is likely to make it worse and cause stiffness. It also causes your muscles to weaken and therefore puts you at much greater risk of injury.

Use simple regular pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen. It is important to control your pain to allow you to move more easily. Hot or cold packs may be applied to your back for comfort. If pain is persisting, see your GP about prescribing stronger painkillers and / or muscle relaxants. Avoid movements or activities that aggravate your back pain.

Have a positive and realistic outlook. Back pain often comes and goes and you will have good and bad days. 85% of back pain is better within 6 weeks but you may have further episodes of pain. Pace yourself and do not over do it.

Regular exercise helps prevent back pain symptoms. Regular exercises such as those on your exercise sheet will help to strengthen and stretch your back muscles. You should do these exercises for 20 - 30 minutes 2 - 4 times a week.

When should I see my GP

You should see your own GP if your back pain is continually affecting your sleep and your daily activities. Your GP can refer you for physiotherapy. See your GP if:

- You are younger than 20 or older than 50 years when you start to get back pain for the first time
- You have lost a significant amount of weight for no reason or if you have had cancer or TB in the past
- You have known osteoporosis
- You have pain in your upper back without any injury
- Your pain is constant, unremitting especially at night, and is getting worse
- You are experiencing pain down one leg with numbness or pins and needles

When should you go to A&E

On rare occasions back pain does need A&E if:

- You have difficulty emptying or controlling your bladder or bowels
- You have numbness around your bottom and saddle area (e.g. difficulty feeling toilet paper when wiping)
- You have pain down both legs, weakness or difficulty walking
- You have had a recent significant injury affecting your back