



MANAGING BACK PAIN

Information for Patients



The news is good!

Almost everyone has low back pain at some time. Fortunately, the spine is strong; and most of the time, pain is caused by strains/sprains to the muscles and ligaments that support and strengthen the back. *Rarely* is back pain caused by a serious or permanent problem.

History and examination are actually the best ways to detect any uncommon but serious causes, and your doctor has not found any sign of a serious cause for **your** back pain. Therefore, an x-ray of your back at this time would only expose you to unnecessary radiation! If your recovery is slower than expected, your doctor will investigate further.

What should I do?

Stay active! Resting in bed is **not** the best thing—more than a few days in bed weakens your back and actually could cause your pain to last longer.

Even with back symptoms, you should try to continue your usual activities. You might have to slow your pace, but the sooner you get moving, the sooner your back pain will improve!

If you work outside the home, much depends on the kind of work you do. Office work may require few changes. On the other hand, if your job involves heavy labour—like a furniture mover—you will probably have trouble working as usual right away. Strenuous activity or heavy lifting could give you trouble, so discuss this with your doctor.

No remedies should be expected to do away with all the discomfort. It is important to be up and around as much as possible even if you are uncomfortable. The sooner you return to normal daily activities, the sooner your symptoms will disappear.

Medications like ibuprofen (Advil®) that relieve pain and inflammation can help.

Some tips about safe ways to be more comfortable as you recover:

- ◆ Sitting may not be comfortable. Try to sit less, and when you do, support the curve of your back with a towel or small pillow. A chair with a slightly reclining back may help.
- ◆ When standing, don't stay in a poor or awkward position for a long time. Raise and rest one foot on a block about 6 or 8 inches high. Try to maintain the natural curve of your back throughout the day. Walk around frequently and crouch periodically to relax your back.
- ◆ When lifting, keep the load close to your belly button. Lifting a carton of milk at arm's length can stress your back more than lifting 30 lbs held close to your body! Also, try to not bend forward, twist or reach when lifting. Keep your abdominal muscles strong.

Exercises may help.

Safe exercises usually include walking, swimming, or riding a stationary bike.

If done correctly, these exercises do **not** stress the back, and they keep your back muscles from becoming weakened.

In addition, exercise can speed your recovery, and may help protect you from future back problems. As your pain lessens, daily exercise will make it easier for you to resume your normal activities.

Check out the following websites:

www.worksafefbc.com>Publications>Online Publications: Back Talk: An owner's manual for backs

www.cfpc.ca>"For Patients">Low Back Pain