

# BACK PAIN

Acute back pain usually improves over 2 to 4 weeks.

It's not always possible to identify the cause of back pain. Sometimes acute back pain can develop after lifting something awkwardly, after a minor injury, or by overstretching the muscles or ligaments attached to your spine. Sometimes there may be a minor problem with the discs or joints between the bones in your spine.

## How can I treat my back pain?

The best treatment for you will depend on what other conditions you may have. Tell your pharmacist about your other conditions and the medicines you are taking. Your pharmacist can help you to choose a suitable treatment.

**Ibuprofen** is an anti-inflammatory painkiller and may help to relieve your pain. You should take 400mg of ibuprofen up to 3 times a day. Take the ibuprofen with food or a drink of milk. Don't take it on an empty stomach.

Don't take ibuprofen if you have:

- heart disease or heart failure, high blood pressure or peripheral arterial disease
- had a heart attack or a stroke
- had a stomach ulcer or bleeding in your stomach
- asthma or other allergies
- liver or kidney problems
- a condition that makes you at risk of bleeding or you are taking medicines that may make you more likely to bleed, such as aspirin or warfarin.

You can take **paracetamol** as well as ibuprofen tablets if you need more pain relief. Take one or two 500mg paracetamol tablets up to 4 times a day. Paracetamol on its own does not work well in treating back pain.

## What else can help?

- Try to get moving and go about your daily activities as normally as possible. This can help you to feel better sooner.
- You can buy hot or cold compression packs from your pharmacy to put on the painful area. Or, a hot water bottle or bag of frozen vegetables wrapped in a cloth will work just as well. Choose hot or cold depending on what works best for you. Make sure that the source of the heat or cold is not in direct contact with your skin.

## Do I need to see my doctor?

Contact your doctor straight away if you have backache and you also have:

- a temperature of 38°C or higher
- lost weight and you don't know why
- a swelling on your back
- pain that doesn't go away when you lie down
- pain in your chest or high up in your back
- pain down your legs and below your knees
- been unable to wee, or can't always make it to the toilet in time anymore
- a numb feeling around your bottom or genitals
- pain that is worse at night.

See your doctor if:

- you've treated your back pain for 3 to 4 weeks and it is not better, or it is worse
- your back pain is stopping you from doing your usual daily activities
- you're over 50 years old
- you have injured your back in an accident or another way
- you have had cancer or tuberculosis
- you inject street drugs
- you have diabetes or a weakened immune system from cancer therapy, steroid therapy, or other medicines or conditions
- you have recently had a urine infection (bacteria in your wee).

## How can I stop my back pain coming back?

- Try to exercise regularly. Stay active by walking, swimming or running.
- You are more likely to have back pain if you are overweight. Exercising and eating a healthy diet can help you to lose weight.
- Try not to sit down for too long, get up and move around regularly.
- Sleep in the most naturally comfortable position on whatever is the most comfortable surface.
- Take care when you lift things.

## Where can I find further information?

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Medicines for mild to moderate pain relief are available on the AWMSG website:

[www.awmsg.org](http://www.awmsg.org) (English) (Welsh)

NHS Direct Wales: [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.