



PREVENTION. CARE. RECOVERY.

Te Kaporeihana Āwhina Hunga Whara

# Knowing about your Low Back Pain



# Knowing about low back pain

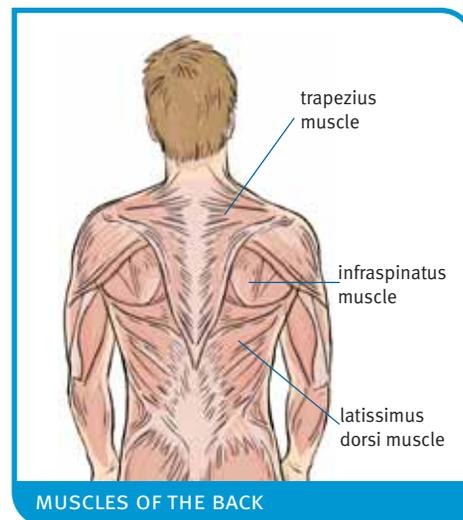
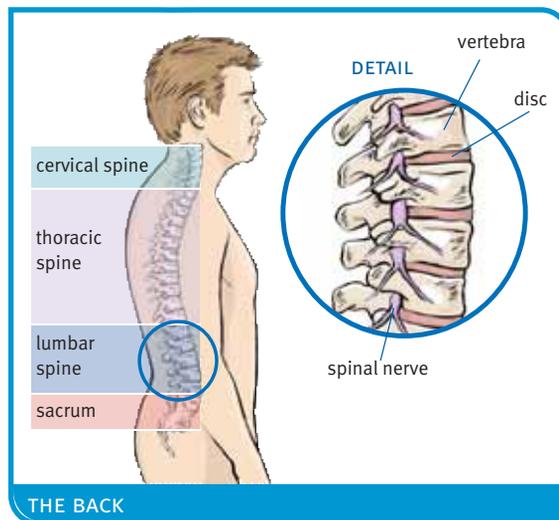
Low back pain is very common with around 80-90% of adults having some sort of back pain in their lifetime.

Although a specific diagnosis is often difficult to make, a common cause can be a sprain or strain of the muscles or ligaments in the lower back. Ligaments connect bone to bone. Ligaments and muscles help protect the joints of the spine.

Back sprains are often a result of over-stretching ligaments. This can happen when bending and lifting awkwardly, with repeated bending actions and making awkward movements with your back.

Low back pain often happens more than once. It is important that you ask your health professional about things you can do to prevent this happening again.

*IMPORTANT: information in this booklet is not intended for use by people with a recent serious back injury – please seek advice from a health professional if you are unsure.*



## Important facts

- Staying active, continuing your usual activities as much as possible and avoiding bed rest are very important in helping your recovery and will not cause harm.
- Pain does not necessarily mean you are causing damage.
- The pain will settle – most people make an excellent recovery.
- X-rays and other tests are not usually needed in the first 4-6 weeks unless Red Flags (serious symptoms – ask your health professional) are present.

## Questions to ask your health professional

- What can be done about my low back pain?
- What can I do to help myself?
- How will this back pain affect my day-to-day life?
- What can I do to help prevent this happening again?
- Do I need to be completely pain free before returning to work?
- How do I find out about what I can do at work?

*Serious back injuries or disease that need specialist treatment are not common but do happen. If you have numbness in the groin or anal area, lose bladder or bowel control and have difficulty walking, you must see your doctor or nearest emergency department urgently.*

# Tips to help your recovery

## When you first see your health professional

- Ask about Red Flags – these are serious symptoms that may mean you need to see a specialist or have other tests.
- Ask about the pain medication that's right for you.
- Tell them about the jobs and activities you do at home and work – they may need to be changed.
- Ask about your treatment plan and discuss it with them.

## During the next one-four weeks

- Stay active. However, if pain medication is not enough to help you stay active, ask about additional treatment options such as physiotherapy, strengthening and flexibility exercises.
- Depending on the type of job or activities you do, changed/alternative work duties or time off may be advised. In this situation it is important you work with your health professional, employer and ACC to develop a safe and durable return to work plan.
- Discuss any worries or concerns with your health professional.

## After four-six weeks

If your symptoms have not improved you need to:

- Discuss any worries or concerns and ask if any further tests are needed (e.g. X-ray, blood tests, or referral to a specialist).
- Ask about the rehabilitation options available to help your recovery.

*Most people with low back pain get better within four weeks*

## Prevention

Many people experience back pain more than once. Things you can do to prevent further problems include;

- Staying fit and keeping good muscle tone – ask your health professional for advice on what type of exercises will help.
- Avoid lifting while twisting or bending forward. For more information on correct lifting techniques see [www.acc.co.nz/injury-prevention/back-injury-prevention](http://www.acc.co.nz/injury-prevention/back-injury-prevention)
- Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.

## Things you can do

- Keep your stomach and low back muscles strong to support your back.
- Never sit in one position for too long. Take plenty of breaks and stretch often.
- When sitting, use an upright chair and make sure your knees are lower than your hips.
- When working bent over, stand upright, place hands on hips and bend backward several times.
- Walking or aqua-jogging may be beneficial types of exercise – ask your health professional.

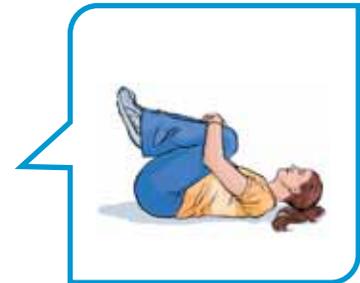
## Exercises

Ask your health professional if these exercises are right for you and how often to do them



**STANDING BACKWARD BEND:**  
Arch backward to make the hollow of your back deeper.

**DOUBLE KNEES TO CHEST STRETCH:**  
Pull both knees into chest until a comfortable stretch is felt in the lower back. Keep back relaxed.



**SITTING POSITION:**  
When sitting, use an upright chair and make your knees lower than your hips. Do this by placing a small cushion under your bottom.

## Staying active

Try to do all the things that you would normally do at home and work. Some tasks that involve heavy lifting, bending, or twisting may need to be temporarily changed.

Most people with physically demanding lives can expect to return to their usual activities by four weeks.

The time it takes to return to normal activities increases with the physical demands of the job.

Most people in desk jobs can expect to return to their usual activities within a few days.



## Everyone has a role to play...

... in supporting your return to activity including work (both paid and unpaid).

### YOUR WORKPLACE SHOULD

- Be safe
- Provide support, help with a rehabilitation plan and suitable duties – restricted hours, alternative or changed tasks – to keep you at work
- Be in contact with ACC

### YOUR HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SHOULD GIVE YOU

- Useful advice and treatment, or referral for treatment
- Support in developing a rehabilitation plan eg exercises
- Appropriate follow-up

### I SHOULD

- Take control and stay positive
- Get in early and report my back pain to my employer
- Seek advice and treatment from a health professional
- Discuss a plan to stay at work with my employer, ACC and health professional

### YOUR FAMILY CAN

- Give you support and encouragement to stay active and positive
- Be reassured adequate support and treatment is being given

### ACC CAN

- Provide information, support and guidance
- Advise your workplace and health professional about ACC programmes that can help you in getting back to work early such as the:
  - Graduated Return to Work
  - Employment Maintenance Programme
  - Activity Based Programme



# My important contacts

## MY HEALTH PROFESSIONAL (EG. DOCTOR, PHYSIOTHERAPIST)

Name

Phone number

## MY EMPLOYMENT CONTACT PERSON (EG. MANAGER)

Name

Phone number

## MY ACC CONTACT PERSON (EG. CASE MANAGER)

Name

Phone number

ACC claim number

## OTHER CONTACTS

Name

Phone number

Name

Phone number

For more information about ACC and our services call 0800 101 996 or visit [www.acc.co.nz](http://www.acc.co.nz). We have interpreters who understand over 30 different languages.