

Back pain is a common issue that affects people of all ages, in fact up to 80% of people will experience back pain in their lifetime. It can be caused by a variety of factors. Unfortunately it is a condition that commonly effects our capacity to perform our day to day activities and therefore can be a debilitating condition. This handout aims to provide you with essential information about back pain and how to manage it effectively.

Types of Back Pain:

- Acute Back Pain: Typically lasts for a few days to a few weeks and is often caused by muscle strains or sprains.
- Chronic Back Pain: Persists for 12 weeks or longer and may be related to more serious underlying conditions.

Common Causes of Back Pain:

- Muscle Strain: Overexertion, lifting heavy objects improperly, or sudden movements can strain muscles and cause pain.
- Herniated Disc: When the discs between the vertebrae rupture or bulge, it can press on nearby nerves.
- Arthritis: Conditions like osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis can affect the spine and cause pain.
- Injury: Trauma from accidents or falls can result in back pain.
- Spinal Stenosis: Narrowing of the spinal canal can put pressure on the spinal cord and nerves in the spine.
- Medical Conditions: Conditions like kidney stones, infections, or tumours can cause referred back pain.

Symptoms:

- Dull, aching, or sharp pain
- Stiffness and limited mobility
- Numbness or tingling in the legs
- Radiating pain into the legs (can also be referred to as sciatica)

Prevention and Management:

- **Exercise:** Regular physical activity helps strengthen back muscles and improve flexibility.
- **Proper Posture:** Maintain good posture when sitting, standing, and lifting objects.
- **Ergonomics:** Ensure your work environment and furniture support a healthy back.
- **Weight Management:** Excess weight can strain the back, so maintain a healthy weight.
- **Healthy Diet:** A balanced diet promotes overall health and reduces the risk of back problems.
- **Avoid Smoking:** Smoking can impair blood flow to spinal tissues, increasing the risk of back pain.
- **Stress Management:** Stress can contribute to muscle tension, so practice relaxation techniques.

When to Seek Professional Help:

If you experience any of the following, it is recommended to consult a healthcare professional:

- Severe or persistent pain
- Pain after a fall or injury
- Weakness, numbness, or tingling in your legs
- Bowel or bladder dysfunction
- Unexplained weight loss

Treatment Options:

- **Physiotherapy:** A physiotherapist can design a personalised exercise and stretching program.
- **Medication:** Pain relievers and anti-inflammatories may be prescribed.
- **Injections:** Corticosteroid injections can reduce inflammation and relieve pain.
- **Surgery:** For severe cases when other conservative treatments fail.