

## **ADVICE FOR PEOPLE WITH BACK PAIN**

### **What is Back Pain?**

Back pain is very common; however with the right advice, most back pain settles quickly and is rarely serious.

In most people the pain comes from muscles, ligaments and joints. Tension and stress can cause muscle tension which may worsen the pain. X-rays are not normally necessary and most x-rays findings are due to normal ageing.

In most cases, people with back pain need to get their back working properly again, and by thinking positively you can help yourself do this.

### **Remain active**

#### **Recommendations**

- **Keep bed rest to a minimum**

Bed rest for more than a day or two can be bad for your back. Even when in bed try to move and stretch within pain limits.

- **Resume normal activities as soon as you can**

Exercise keeps you strong; makes you fit and make you feel good. Start slowly and gradually build up over a few days or weeks. Then keep it up! Exercise that does not stress your back includes walking, swimming and using an exercise bike. You may ache at first but this does not necessarily mean you are doing harm.

- **Modify your activities**

Some activities involved in your daily life need to be done with care and may need to be modified. At first, try not to do one activity for than 20-30 minutes.

- **Lifting**

- Lift only what you can handle.
- Bend your knees.
- Lift and carry close to your body.
- Use your feet to turn, don't twist your back.

- **Sitting**

- Use an upright chair.
- Use a rolled up towel/back cushion/ a roll in the small of your back for support.

- **Standing**

Ensure that your work surface is a comfortable height. If not, maybe try putting one foot on a low box or stool.

- **Driving**

- Adjust your seat from time to time.
- Use a rolled up towel/back cushion/a roll in the small of your back for support.

- Break up a long journey.
- **Sleeping**
  - You may prefer a firm bed.
  - Try board beneath your mattress first.

### **Coping and preventing a recurrence**

- Remember that most back pain will settle and rarely due to any serious disease.
- People who cope well with back pain remain positive and stay active, **so keep up your daily activities bearing in mind the advice in this leaflet.**
- **Try to stay fit.** If you do have a recurrence of back pain there are treatments that can help you control the pain. These include: Painkillers or anti-inflammatories as directed by your pharmacist/medical doctor
- **Heat or cold**  
Try a cold pack wrapped in a wet towel or a hot water bottle applied for 15 minutes at a time, or a warm bath or shower.  
**Caution:** Never use on areas where you can not appreciate the feeling of hot or cold, or where the skin is broken, or where you suffer from circulatory problems.
- **Relaxation**  
To help reduce muscle tension.

### **When to consult your Doctor**

Although back pain is rarely due to any serious disease, there are some instances where you should see your Doctor:

- Have severe pain which worsens over several weeks or if you are unwell with back pain.
- Develop a difficulty with passing urine, or have to pass urine more frequently.
- Develop numbness around your back passage or genitals.
- Develop numbness, pins and needles or weakness in both legs.
- Develop unsteadiness on your feet.

These instances are very rare and back pain rarely means there is any serious damage to your back.