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| <b>Title of Leaflet</b> | Back and neck pain (for ED)          |                   |                           |                              |
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Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible. Please therefore always check specific advice or any concerns you may have with your doctor.

Physiotherapy Department  
Frimley Park Hospital

Back pain



Information for patients, relatives and carers



Back problems are a common concern for many people, causing pain to be felt in the back, buttocks and/or legs. The type and amount of pain felt may vary with certain movements and positions. The following information is aimed to help ease your discomfort.

**If you have any concerns, seek advice from your doctor or Physiotherapist.**

### Stay active

One of the most important things you can do is to keep moving and continue with your normal activities as much as possible.

It used to be thought that bed rest would help you recover from a bad back, but it's now known that people who remain active are likely to recover more quickly.

This may be difficult at first, but don't be discouraged – your pain will start to improve eventually. Consider taking painkillers if the pain is stopping you from carrying on as normal.

There's no need to wait until you're completely pain-free before returning to work. Going back to work will help you return to a normal pattern of activity and may distract you from the pain.

### Exercises

If your neck is stiff or painful, getting your neck moving can really help it improve.

- 1) Gently tilt your head to each side, taking your ear down towards your shoulder
- 2) Gently turn your head to look over each shoulder

Repeat these slowly 5 times in each direction about 3-4 times a day.

If in any doubt about any exercises or activities please contact your GP or Physiotherapist.

**If you have any other concerns, please contact your GP or return to the Emergency Department.**

Neck pain can also include other symptoms such as stiffness, headaches, dizziness and abnormal symptoms such as burning/prickling/pins and needles and shoulder pain.

### Managing neck pain at home

For most types of general neck pain, the advice is to carry on with your normal daily activities, keep active, and take painkillers to relieve the symptoms.

These steps may help you to manage your pain:

- take regular doses of paracetamol, ibuprofen (Nurofen), or a combination of the two, to control pain – ibuprofen gel can be rubbed on to your neck as an alternative to taking tablets (always follow the instructions that come with the medication)
- try holding a hot water bottle or heat pack to your neck – this can help reduce the pain and any muscle spasms, although some people find cold packs offer better relief
- try to alter your position and posture regularly throughout the day and consider an ergonomic assessment of your desk if you sit for long periods for work.
- avoid wearing a neck collar – there's no evidence to suggest wearing a neck collar will help to heal your neck, and it's generally better to keep your neck mobile
- avoid driving if you find it difficult to turn your head – this may prevent you being able to view traffic.

### Pain relief

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) tablets, such as ibuprofen (Nurofen), can help relieve back pain. Many types are available to buy from pharmacies or supermarkets without a prescription.

But NSAIDs aren't suitable for everyone, so check the box or leaflet to see whether you can take the medicine first. Speak to a pharmacist if you're not sure.

If you can't take NSAIDs, alternative medicines such as codeine may help. This is a stronger painkiller that should ideally only be used for a few days, as it can cause addiction if used for longer.

Paracetamol on its own isn't recommended for back pain, but it may be used alongside stronger painkillers such as codeine.

Muscle relaxants may be prescribed by your GP if you have painful muscle spasms in your back.

### Hot and cold packs

Some people find that heat – for example, a hot bath or a hot water bottle placed on the affected area – helps ease the pain when back pain first starts.

Cold, such as an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables placed on the painful area, can also help in the short-term. However, don't put the ice directly on your skin, as it might cause a cold burn. Wrap an ice pack or bag of frozen vegetables in a cloth first.

Another option is to alternate between hot and cold using ice packs and a hot water bottle. Hot and cold compression packs can be bought at most pharmacies.

### Posture

Try to minimise the amount of time sitting to 20-30 minutes at a time initially and aim to change your position regularly throughout the day.

### Exercises and lifting

Simple back exercises and stretches can often reduce back pain and you can carry these out at home as often as you need to.

You can be prescribed more specific exercises by a Physiotherapist and your GP can arrange a referral for this.

It is best to avoid heavy lifting while you have acute back pain. For any lifting try and use the correct technique by keeping the load close to you and bending your knees to squat up and down. This will minimise the load on your back.

**If you have any concerns contact your GP or return to the emergency department**

**See a GP urgently or go to A&E if you have back pain and you:**

- have numbness around your bottom or genitals
- can't pass urine
- can't control when you pass urine or open your bowels
- have new pain into both legs at the same time
- have sexual dysfunction (new onset)
- have a very high temperature or you feel hot and shivery
- have unexplained weight loss
- have a swelling in your back

### Neck pain

**Neck pain or a stiff neck is a common problem which usually gets better after a few days or weeks. It's rarely a sign of anything serious.**

You can often get a painful or stiff neck if you:

- sleep in an awkward position
- use a computer for a prolonged period of time
- strain a muscle because of bad posture
- have been involved in an accident such as a road traffic collision – Symptoms after an injury may occur immediately or can develop over a few days

Anxiety and stress can also sometimes cause tension in your neck muscles, leading to neck pain.