



Participants' booklet for the ESCAPE-pain
for backs programme

ESCAPE-pain for backs is a rehabilitation programme for people with low back pain. The programme is based off of the robust evidence base and findings from the ESCAPE-pain programme for hips and knees, developed by Professor Mike Hurley. The programme is hosted by the Health Innovation Network and is being piloted in various outpatient hospital settings.

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Introduction

Back pain is a very common problem and will effect many people at some point in their lives, for most people back pain isn't serious and usually resolves within a few weeks. However, a small number of people will go on to develop chronic back pain which can be disabling and have a significant impact on the way people are able to lead day-to-day life. Less than 1% of back pain is the result of a serious condition such as a fracture or cancer.

It is often not possible to determine what has caused the back pain, even with a scan or an x-ray. This type of back pain is often called 'non-specific' back pain.

As we grow older, the bones, discs and ligaments in the spine can naturally weaken as they age. This happens to all of us to some degree as part of the ageing process, but it doesn't have to be a problem and not everyone will have pain from this. As we grow older the discs in the spine become thinner and the spaces between the vertebrae become narrower. Little pieces of bone, known as osteophytes, may form at the edges of the vertebrae and facet joints. The medical term for this is spondylosis and is very similar to the changes caused by osteoarthritis in other joints. Other joints commonly affected are the hips, knees, and hands, and many people will experience symptoms in one or more of these areas as they get older.

Approximately 9.11 million (16.9%) people in England have severe back, and it is becoming more common as we live longer.

Many people think back pain is untreatable – this is not correct. Whilst getting rid of back pain completely might not be possible, there is a lot you can do to reduce pain and maximise your ability to do what you want.

It is very important that those people affected by back pain *keep moving* and return to normal activities and work as soon as possible. As well as remaining active it is important to understand your condition and adopt a healthy lifestyle such as keeping our weight down. This approach also helps us to feel in control of our condition and to manage our symptoms better in the long-term.

The information contained within this booklet along with discussions you have throughout the programme will help you manage your back pain more effectively, and allow you to lead a more active lifestyle.

Aims of the programme: Cycle of change, introduction to activity

What is pain? Myth buster quiz

Pacing activities

Benefits of physical activity

Goal setting

Healthy lifestyle: diet, alcohol and smoking

Social and psychological factors influencing pain

Other management

Relaxation techniques and sleep

Managing flare – ups

Managing back pain in the long term

Celebrating our success

Programme Aims

This programme will not 'cure' your back pain or stop you from getting pain and stiffness, but it will provide you with the skills and techniques to manage your symptoms more effectively, help you to appreciate the benefits of simple exercise and carry out normal activities without fearing pain, and set goals to motivate you to continue exercising in the long-term.

The aims of this programme are to;



Enable you to manage your back pain, helping you to **carry out normal activities** without fearing pain.



Provide you with skills and suggest ways to **manage your symptoms** more effectively.



Help you to appreciate the benefits of simple exercise and encourage you to **become more active**.



Work with you to plan your activities, set yourself goals that will motivate you to **continue exercising**.

To help you in the long-term, it is important that you receive the right information about your back pain. As well as understand and appreciate the benefits of exercise. But how do you feel about exercise at the moment? Do you think it will help or not? What are your previous experiences?

Back Pain



Back pain can affect people of any age. However, it is more common in people over 30. It is a very common condition which affects about one third of people in the UK, and approximately 9.11 million people in England are affected by severe back pain.

Joint changes

As we grow older, the bones, discs and ligaments in the spine can naturally weaken as they age. This happens to all of us to some degree as part of the ageing process, but it doesn't have to be a problem and not everyone will have pain from this.

As we grow older the discs in the spine become thinner and the spaces between the vertebrae become narrower. Little pieces of bone, known as osteophytes, may form at the edges of the vertebrae and facet joints.

The medical term for this is spondylosis and is very similar to the changes caused by osteoarthritis in other joints. There is no cure for the degenerative changes seen in joints, but this does not mean there is nothing that can be done to help the problem. In fact you can make a significant difference to your condition if you follow a healthy lifestyle, which includes remaining active and keeping your weight controlled.

X-rays and scans

Often it is not possible to work out the specific cause of your back pain, even after you have had an x-ray or scan. Evidence has shown that x-rays and scans are not associated with improved outcomes. They can sometimes even be unhelpful, leading to unnecessary treatments or procedures.

There is often a 'cycle of change' related to how we feel about exercise. Read through the categories on the next page and see which part of the cycle represents your views the best. Then, over the next few weeks see if your position changes.

The Change Cycle – Stages



THINKING	<p>You recognise the need to be more active</p> <p>You have yet to make any changes in your lifestyle</p> <p>You are seriously considering a more active lifestyle</p>
PREPARING	<p>You have thought about how you may change your lifestyle</p> <p>You have taken small steps towards changing your lifestyle</p> <p>You are open to advice and discussion about what to do</p>
TAKING ACTION	<p>You have made significant changes to your lifestyle</p> <p>You are adapting to your new healthier, active life</p> <p>You require some advice on how to progress your activity</p>
MAINTAINING	<p>You are exercising on a regular basis</p> <p>You have overcome the initial difficulties of greater activity</p> <p>You feel confident that you can continue in the long-term</p>
RELAPSING	<p>You have stopped exercising</p> <p>You have had difficulties continuing with an active lifestyle</p> <p>You could not overcome the barriers to exercising</p>

Exercise Circuit

You may be nervous about moving, especially if you have experienced pain in the past. However, exercise is a safe and effective way to manage your condition. The maximum time you will spend on each of these exercises is two minutes. However, if this is too long for you, it is important that you stop when you feel as though you have done enough and need a break. All exercise is beneficial to your back pain, so try to choose a range of different exercises and not just those specific to the back. You can make notes in the table below to help you remember what each exercise is e.g. starting position or direction of movement.

Exercise Programme:

WEEK	1	2	3	4	5	6	Time /Reps
Exercise bike							
Sit to stand							
Wall push up							
Bridging							
Step ups/down							
Standing on one leg							
Knee lifts							
Knee rolls							
Knee to chest							
Pelvis rotations							
Side bends							
Torso rotations							
Marching							

You do not have to do all of the exercises, just as many as you feel comfortable with.

What is pain?



It is often not possible to identify the exact cause of your back pain, even after you have had a scan or x-ray. Everyone's experience of pain will be different, and we use different words to describe our pain. Some people might describe the way they feel as tired, fed-up, depressed, whilst other people will describe the nature of their pain as sharp, ache, shooting.

We cannot cure back pain, so it is unlikely your pain will go completely. It can however be reduced, and importantly the way you feel about it and the impact pain has on your life can be altered.

Although changes to your spine and tissues may be the cause of some of your pain, there are other factors which play an important part in how you experience pain. The factors can be grouped in to three categories:

- Psychological; your mood and beliefs about your health
- Social; your relationships, housing and job
- Biological; your bodies tissues and structures

Persistent pain

It takes a maximum of three to six months for the tissues in your body to heal, despite this, some people with back pain can experience pain and symptoms for much longer. This is called persistent or chronic pain.

A useful analogy for persistent pain is, 'volume':

When you have an injury such as back pain, your brain 'turns up' the volume of the messages coming from your back. This is helpful when an injury first happens as it makes us more aware and allows us to modify our activity. Generally, the volume setting returns to normal as we recover. However, if the pain goes on longer than six months this increased volume can begin to be unhelpful as it is not representing what is happening in the tissues. The brain and body can continue to produce pain. This is an over-sensitivity of the nervous system and not on-going damage to our tissues. Importantly, pain does not equal damage.

Over time the nervous system can continue to become more ‘sensitive’ and we can get a lot of pain when we have not done very much, or pain can become more constant. If pain has persisted for a long time it can be unhelpful to continue to search for a cause or reason for the pain in the tissues as these have now healed and the pain is being produced from an over-sensitivity of the nervous system. The most effective treatment at this stage is to try and get your back moving normally, building fitness and returning to normal activities.

Positive thoughts can reduce pain and allow for better coping while negative thoughts increase pain and reduce function. Increasing your understanding about pain has been shown to be helpful in calming down the nervous system. Understanding that pain doesn’t equal damage can allow you to feel confident about being physically active and returning to the activities you enjoy.

Remaining positive about your joint problems will help you to cope with your symptoms more effectively and feel less pain.



The key to successful long-term management of your joint symptoms is to carry on doing the things you enjoy, just making small adjustments in the way you do things, but not to stop doing them altogether.

Back pain – quiz

Using everything you have learnt on the course and the information in this booklet, try to answer the questions below. You will have a chance to check your answers during the class.

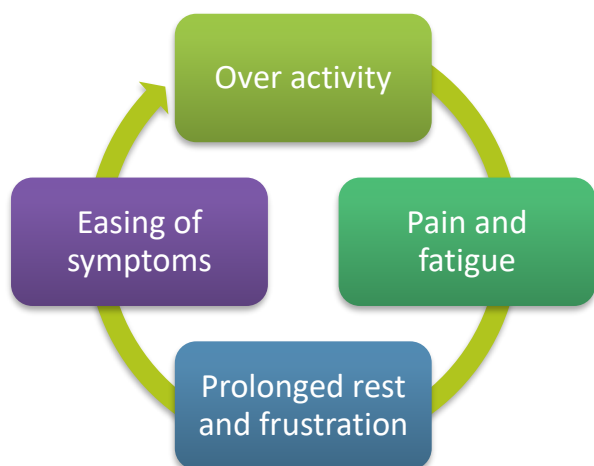
True or false?	
1. You can have back pain without damage or injury	
2. Persistent pain means an injury hasn’t healed properly	
3. Having back pain means you have a weak back	
4. Scans will show me exactly what’s wrong with my back	

5. The back is vulnerable to injury	
6. People with back pain should avoid bending or lifting	
7. The sensitivity of the nervous system can change	
8. The way we think and feel can influence our pain experience	
9. Back pain will worsen as I get older	
10. Evidence shows being active is the most effective way to manage back pain	

Pacing

Tired muscles, fatigue and reduced stamina are common symptoms of back pain, it is therefore important you adapt your activity to a level that's right for you. This will reduce the risk of pain and further damage to your back.

Many people experience pain and discomfort during common activities of daily living, such as walking, stair-climbing or gardening. They mistakenly think this pain means they are causing more damage to their back, so often avoid performing these activities. This is not a good way of dealing with the problem as you are associating a normal activity with back pain, leading to avoidance and a less active lifestyle.

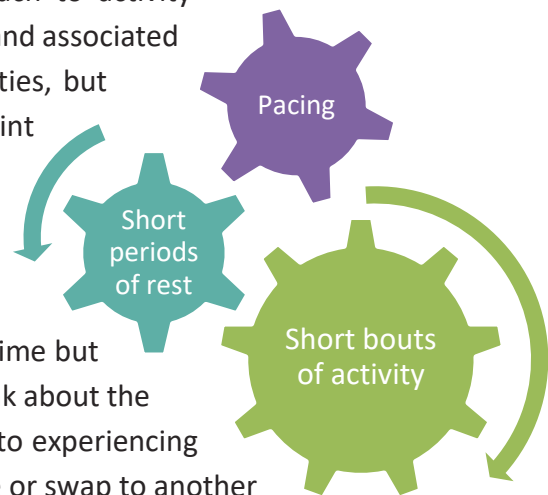


It is generally not the activity that causes pain, rather the intensity at which the activity is performed.

Despite an increasing level of discomfort, people with back pain generally perform an activity until pain gets so bad it prevents them from continuing. They are then forced into a prolonged period of rest or inactivity whilst the pain eases.

'Pacing' encourages you to adopt a different approach to activity – alternating periods of activity with rest to reduce pain and associated anxiety. This allows you to pursue your normal activities, but accounts for the loss of fitness, muscle weakness and joint limitations associated with your back pain.

Try to identify an activity that you do on a regular basis but find particularly uncomfortable – think about how you perform this task. Most people recognise a pattern of experiencing pain after a relatively short period of time but continue until the task is completed and then rest. Think about the time period when you start to feel slightly tired, prior to experiencing pain and discomfort, and have a short rest at this stage or swap to another activity.



Benefits of Exercise



Anybody can exercise! It doesn't matter how old you are, how long it is since you last exercised, or that you have back pain – exercise will help maintain your back and make you fitter and healthier.

A lot of research has shown that people with back pain experience a reduction in their symptoms if they start to become more active. Other benefits of being active are reduced anxiety, a greater sense of well-being, better sleeping patterns, weight reduction and feeling more in control of your back pain.

Exercise Recommendations

Exercise is good for you and you will notice positive changes in your health if you take part in regular activity. You're probably already doing some exercise without really knowing it! Exercise does not have to mean going to the gym, swimming or cycling; activities such as walking, gardening and climbing stairs all count towards your recommended daily levels.

The table below outlines what you should be aiming for.

HOW LONG?	You should aim for at least thirty minutes activity a day. This can be in short bouts or in one go
WHEN?	On most days of the week, if not all
HOW HARD?	You should feel slightly warm, and your heart should beat a little faster. You should still be able to talk at the same time as exercising
WHAT?	Anything that you enjoy! Walking, dancing, exercise classes, gardening, swimming are just some examples. It may be easier to try activities that can become part of a daily routine.

Think about your current levels of exercise and activity. Remember walking to the shops, climbing stairs or gardening such as digging or mowing all count to your recommended daily levels of activity, as long as you are doing them at an intensity which raises your heart rate. Now, think back over the last three days and fill out the table below making note of all the exercise you have taken. You'll probably be surprised how much you already do!

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3
ACTIVITY?			
HOW LONG?			

Pain and Exercise



You may sometimes experience discomfort when you are exercising or for a day or two afterwards, especially if it's a new activity or something you haven't done for some time. Don't worry, this does not mean you have harmed your back or that you should stop the activity. It is almost inevitable that with long-term back pain you will sometimes experience aches and pains during exercise and activity, but what is important is that you recognise the need to keep your back moving without overdoing it. This will come with experience, and you will gradually learn what level is right for you.

Remember, exercise related discomfort does not mean your back is being harmed.

Goal Setting

It's much easier to become more active and do more exercise if you set yourself a goal. Setting a long-term goal however may feel daunting or off-putting, so consider the smaller steps that lead to what you want to ultimately achieve. For example, your eventual aim may be to walk to work or the local shops. The stepping stones to these goals may be to get off one bus stop before your destination, or to do regular shorter walking distances, slowly building up to your ultimate aim.

Planning is essential to achieving a goal. Think about how you are going to adjust your daily routine to include more exercise. This may seem like an inconvenience, but small adjustments will help you achieve your long-term goal.

Walk more often

After lunchtime
Monday/Wednesday/Friday

Outside, walking to
the post box

Three times a week, up
to 10 minutes at a time.

Using Action Plans

An 'Action Plan' is a record of what you want to achieve, and how you will go about it. It will help you to reach your long-term goal by breaking your activity down into achievable, short-term aims. It will also allow you to monitor your progress – once you have achieved your goal reward yourself to celebrate your success! Action plans also help you decide whether to set a new, slightly harder goal, or whether you want to remain at the same level to gain more confidence in your task. Goals and actions plans should be:



If you have difficulty achieving your goals and feel you are not progressing, your goal was probably too difficult, and you may need to adjust your goal so that whilst challenging it is also achievable.

Action Plan

Date:

My goal for this week is to (e.g. walk more, take the stairs more often);

When will I do it (e.g. time of day?)

Where will I do it (e.g. at home, on way to work)?

How much/how long for?

Fill this section out each day for the next week as a diary of your achievements;

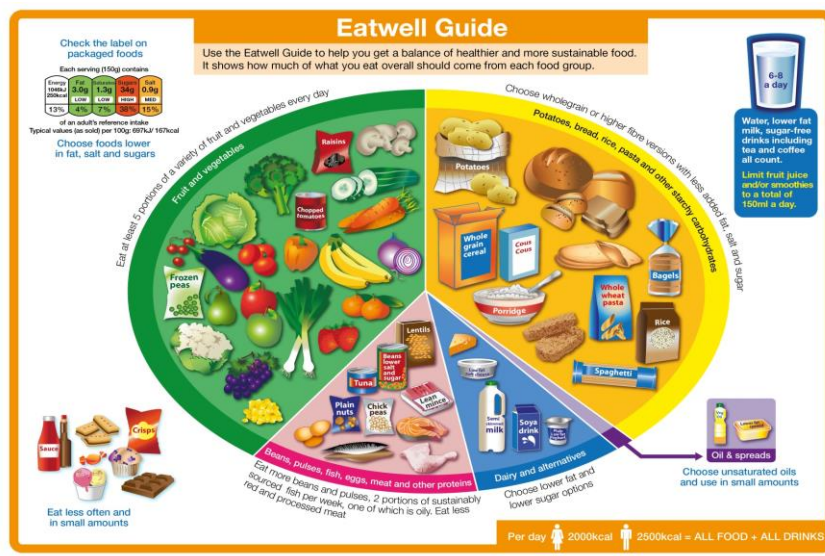
Day	What I did	How I/my back felt
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Healthy Lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle has both short and long term health benefits. Long term, eating a balanced diet, taking regular exercise, moderating alcohol consumption, stopping smoking, getting enough sleep and maintaining a healthy weight can add years to your life and reduce the risk of certain diseases including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and obesity, as well as help you manage your back pain. In the short-term it can also make you feel and look your best, give you more energy and help you maintain a healthy weight.

The key to reducing the risk of these diseases is making small changes to your daily life - eating healthier food, getting your 5-a-day, having treats occasionally, and taking more exercise. Improving your lifestyle with small steps in the right direction will have a big impact on your well-being and back pain.

The single most important link between diet and back pain is that the heavier you are the greater strain you put on your spine resulting in increased pain. So, it is very important to keep your weight at an appropriate level, eat healthily and take regular exercise. There is no good evidence that any particular food or drink can make your back pain either better or worse. There is no 'special' diet to help joint health such as the joints in your spine, and no diet will prevent you getting pain in other joints. The b limited amounts of fats and sugars. It Calcium, which all contribute to joint h as you follow a healthy, balanced diet.



This picture gives you an idea of how your diet should be divided, according to the foods that you eat. Other tips include:

- Eating 5 portions of fruit or vegetables each day;
- Reducing weekly amounts of alcohol;
- Drinking more water;
- Grilling food instead of frying;
- Choosing fish or poultry as alternatives to red meat.

Although you may think you have a healthy diet, and don't really eat that much it can sometimes be surprising how much you do eat in relation to the amount of physical activity taken. Very simply if your caloric intake exceeds the amount of energy you use, then you will put on weight.

The next page shows a food and exercise diary. Fill this out over the next week to give you an idea of what your diet really consists of, and how active you are. If you are having difficulties with your weight, you should discuss this with your GP or practice dietician.

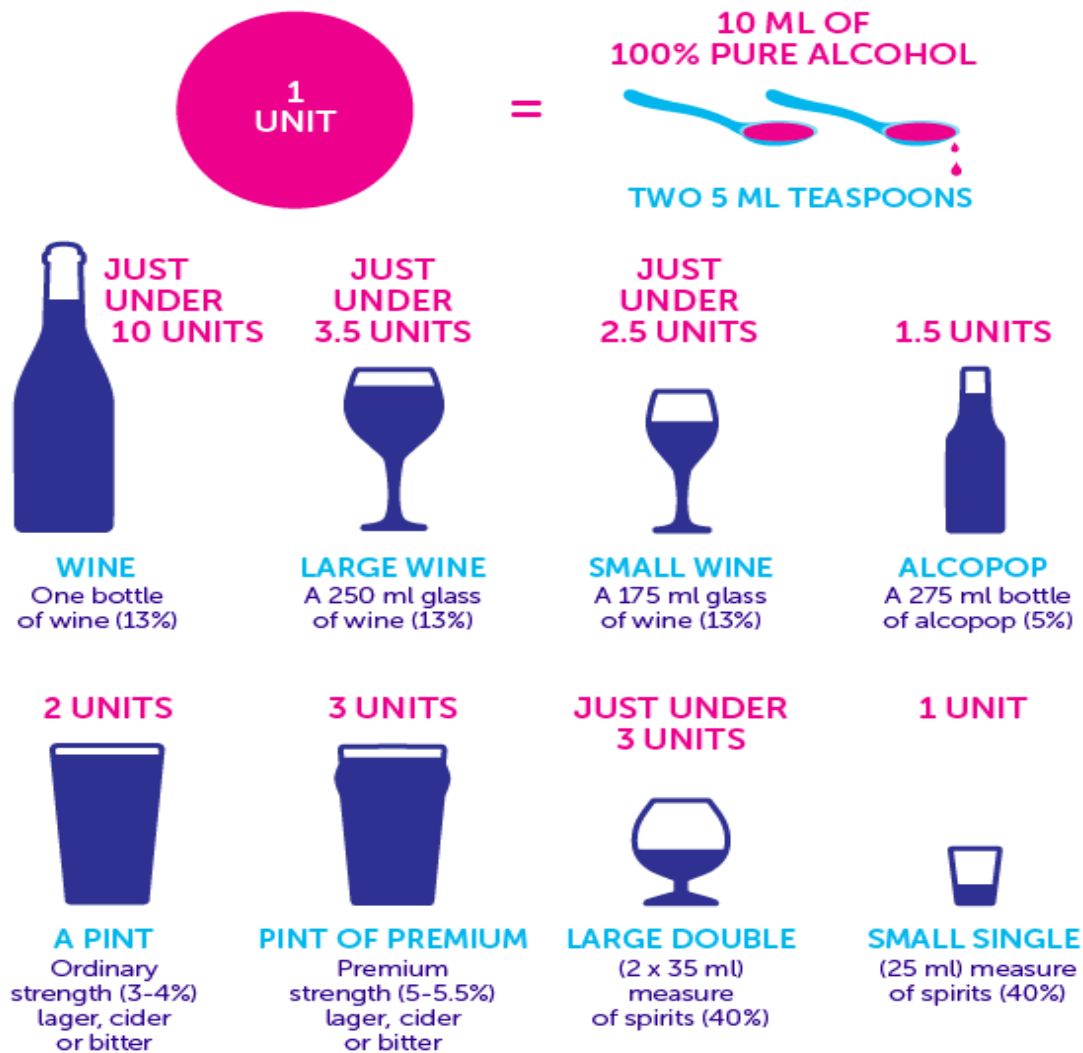
Food and Exercise Diary

DAY	FOOD/DRINK INTAKE	EXERCISE
MONDAY		
TUESDAY		
WEDNESDAY		
THURSDAY		
FRIDAY		
SATURDAY		
SUNDAY		

Drinking in moderation

As part of a healthy lifestyle it is important to think about the amount of alcohol you are consuming and modify it if necessary. The guidelines for protecting your health recommend drinking no more than 14 units of alcohol a week, which should be spread evenly over three or more days in the week.

HOW MANY UNITS ARE IN YOUR DRINK?



Stopping smoking

There are several benefits to stopping smoking. Stopping smoking can reduce your risk of developing cancer, heart disease and strokes. Some studies have shown that smoking may also be linked to developing chronic back pain.

For more information about stopping smoking speak to your pharmacist or GP.

Progress and Changes in Symptoms

You are now mid-way through the programme and you may have already started to notice improvement in your symptoms, and felt some benefits from the exercise or the amount of activity you are doing. Any improvements, no matter how small are very important in helping you to manage your joints in the long-term.

Back pain develops over a long time, so don't be disappointed if you haven't experienced spectacular changes in your symptoms yet. If you feel as though you understand your back problems more and have more confidence in managing your pain this can help you and your back in the future!

Think about the last three weeks and make a note below of any changes that have happened in such a short space of time.

How have my back pain and symptoms changed?	
What have I learnt about exercise?	
Have I changed the amount of exercise and activity I'm doing?	

What other changes would I like to see?

On the next page is another 'Action Plan'. Think about what you achieved in your last 'Action Plan' and how you would like to take your achievements forward. Now complete the next page to give you a new goal for the coming week.

Action Plan

Date:

My goal for this week is to (e.g. walk more, take the stairs more often);

When will I do it (e.g. time of day?)

Where will I do it (e.g. at home, on way to work)?

How much/how long for?

Fill this section out each day for the next week as a diary of your achievements;

Day	What I did	How I/my back felt
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Factors influencing pain

Although some people may have changes in the structure of their spine such as degeneration of the discs, many people will not know the exact cause of their back pain. Pain is caused, not only by pain messages sent to the brain from the tissues but also other important factors such as mood, previous experiences of pain and self-esteem. These factors will all affect how you cope with the problem. For people who experience pain over a long period of time, psychological factors (what you believe and how you feel) often become more influential than physical or mechanical changes, and can have a major impact on pain levels, your ability to cope with the pain and how well you function in daily life. People with long-standing back pain can become anxious and depressed which often leads to a feeling of worsening symptoms.

Decreases in your ability to do the things you want may lead to frustration, anger, low mood or anxiety. This in turn may lead to decreased motivation to remain active (e.g. exercise or work), resulting in further inactivity, weight-gain, pain and physical deterioration.

It is important for your spine health and your sense of well-being that you remain active, and find things to distract you from thinking about your back pain all of the time.

Remaining positive about your joint problems, continuing to be active and retaining purpose will help you cope with your pain more effectively. Contact with other people is important, and helps when we're feeling a bit down.

Other management strategies

Medication

There are different types of drugs, injections, creams and gels for back pain that can be prescribed or bought over the counter, in addition to many alternative remedies that are available. Your GP should discuss the benefits and potential side-effects of drugs with you. The following information will help you to understand the different medications and how they may influence your joint symptoms.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or **NSAIDs** help relieve pain and reduce inflammation in your joints, and they come in both tablet and cream forms. NSAIDs can either be prescribed or bought over-the-counter (ibuprofen). In the past, there have been serious side-effects associated with NSAID use which led to the development of a new type of NSAID called a COX-2, examples being Celebrex and Arcoxia. These new drugs are thought to have fewer side-effects, and are often prescribed alongside another drug that further reduces the risk of any gastric problems. These drugs should only be taken for short periods, but not on a long-term basis.

The cream or 'topical' varieties of NSAIDs such as Ibuleve and Voltaren are rubbed into the painful area to relieve symptoms. The action of rubbing or massaging the drug onto the skin is also likely to help in addition to the drug. Unlike the tablet version, NSAIDs creams and gels are not associated with side-effects and therefore can be used for long periods of time. Some people may also find the chilli based cream Capsaicin beneficial in relieving painful, non-inflamed joints.

Opioids are strong painkillers that should only be prescribed when you have an 'flare up' of acute back pain and if NSAIDs have been ineffective or cannot be taken. There is very limited evidence to suggest opioids are effective in helping people with chronic back pain. They are associated with side effects such as nausea, constipation, drowsiness, dizziness and confusion. They can lead to a dependency and addiction.

Glucosamine is a naturally occurring substance in the body that helps produce certain joint tissues. Although it used to be prescribed by GPs, research shows little evidence that it helps people's joints and is therefore infrequently prescribed now. However, as it is considered a food supplement it is available to buy in high street pharmacies and health shops. If there is any benefit, glucosamine should be taken at a dose of 1500mg per day. It may take 3-4 months before you notice any benefit, but if there is no change in your symptoms after this then it may not be worth pursuing.

Tips for getting the best out of your medication:

- Use medication as it has been prescribed
- It is ok to take a medication 'holiday' to see if they are effective or not.
- You can choose to stop taking medication
- Pharmacists and GPs can support you in taking your medication effectively.

Other common therapies

Many people do not want to take drugs or want to take as little medication as possible so try other ways to ease their pain. Although there are many 'alternative' therapies that are said to help back pain, there is often very little research evidence to support their use. These types of therapy are not available as part of NHS services however, you may have heard of some of these therapies and even tried them yourself.

TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation) is a small electronic device which sends tingling pulses through the skin via adhesive pads. It works by disrupting the perception of pain signals, thereby reducing sensation of pain. TENS may be beneficial for some people. Also they are convenient as they can be worn throughout the day underneath clothes, and therefore do not significantly restrict normal daily activities. TENS machines can be bought from many high street pharmacies.

Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese intervention that relieves pain through the insertion of needles into the skin. The mechanism of pain relief is likely to be similar to TENS via disruption of pain signals. There is no evidence to suggest whether this treatment is beneficial for chronic back pain.

Relaxation Techniques

Becoming more aware of the changes that occur in your muscles when you're tense encourages a calmer reaction to pain and can provide you with an alternative way of controlling your symptoms, relieving stress and assisting with sleeping difficulties.

There are many different techniques that encourage this awareness and promote relaxation. The most common requires you to experience the feeling of relaxation and reduced muscle tension, through recognition of how your muscles feel when they are tense, and the pain associated with that tension.

Another common technique is to visualise a picture, a photograph or a place you have visited and found relaxing. Concentrate on this scene, and use all your senses to immerse yourself in the place and feel as if you are there. Think about what you can see; the sounds that you can hear; the smells around you; and the things that you can touch.

Try different techniques until you find something that is useful for you. Whichever technique you choose requires practice before it becomes very helpful or you feel entirely comfortable or confident in what you are doing. If you are particularly interested in relaxation techniques, there are a variety of classes, audio tapes and DVDs available to help develop your skills.



Breathing Exercises



Visualisation



Recordings



Apps

On the next page is a set of instructions on one of the relaxation techniques available. Find a comfortable, quiet place and give relaxation a try!

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Take a long slow deep breath in through your nose. Hold the breath for a moment, then breathe out through your mouth. Take another slow breath in through your nose. Fill your lungs completely. Hold it for a moment...and release the breath through your mouth.

Throughout the session you will tense various muscles throughout your body. This should not be vigorous, just tighten each muscle firmly but gently as you breathe in. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can simply relax and breathe normally.

When you're relaxed and ready to start, shift your attention to your feet. Take a moment to focus on how they feel.

Slowly tense the muscles in your feet and calves, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10...and relax.

Slowly tense the muscles in thighs, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10...and relax.

Slowly tense the muscles in your buttocks, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10... and relax.

Slowly tense the muscles in your tummy, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10...and relax.

Slowly tense the muscles in your back, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10...and relax.

Slowly make a fist, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10...and relax.

Slowly tense the muscles in your shoulders, lifting towards your ears, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10...and relax.

Slowly tense the muscles in your face, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10...and relax.

Take a long slow deep breath in through your nose. Hold the breath for a moment, then breathe out through your mouth, and continue breathing normally.

Feel the heaviness in your body as you feel completely relaxed.

Sleep health

Sleep is essential for good mental and physical health. Research has shown regular poor sleep puts people at increased risk of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. Most people need around 8 hours of good quality sleep a night, but it is individual, and some people will need more and some less.

Tips of sleep health

- Routine – keeping regular sleeping hours can be very helpful.
- Limit blue light – electronic devices emit blue light which can disturb our internal body clock. It is recommended that you stop watching TV and using electronic devices such as smart phones and tablets two hours before going to bed.
- Caffeine – caffeine is a stimulant which effects the nervous system and makes you feel more awake. It is recommended that you do not drink large amounts of caffeine after 3 – 4pm.
- Having an optimal bedroom environment – try to optimise your bedroom environment by limiting noise and light and ensuring it isn't too warm.
- Regular exercise – evidence has shown regular exercise is one of the most beneficial ways to improve sleep. It can enhance all aspects of sleep and have be used to reduce symptoms of insomnia.

Managing Flare-ups

The course of back pain is variable from person to person. Most people will have ups-and-downs as the pain comes and goes, although occasionally there may be short periods when your pain seems worse.

These increases in pain are called exacerbations or 'flare-ups' and are sometimes a sign that you've overdone an activity. Sometimes however it may seem that there is no apparent reason for the change in pain, but this is often due to your muscles being weakened from prolonged periods of inactivity.

It is normal for back pain to occasionally flare-up. It does not mean your condition is worsening; it is just a temporary situation and doesn't mean you need to see your GP as it will generally settle down within a few days if you do the right things. However, if the pain is different from your 'normal' pain then you may need to seek advice from your GP.

If you experience a flare-up use the skills and knowledge you have learnt so far to manage problems yourself.



Rest for a couple of days. This does not mean remaining in bed, but reducing the intensity or avoiding unnecessary activity until your pain settles down.



Use heat to relieve the pain.



If you are not already taking the maximum dose, you may need to increase your drugs for 2-3 days to help ease the symptoms.



Do some simple exercises in lying or sitting to keep the area moving and reduce stiffness.



If you feel anxious, use relaxation techniques to help keep yourself calm.



As the pain eases gradually increase your activity levels again. This may take a week or so before you're back to your normal levels – don't rush if you don't feel ready. Back to normal, self-managing your back pain!

Long-term Exercise

Once you experience the benefits of exercise you'll realise how important it is to keep going! Although you may be happy and have the motivation to exercise on your own there are many organisations that support group exercise and activities to help you remain active.

It is very important you find an activity you enjoy doing (e.g. walking, swimming, dancing, yoga) that you can do regularly, maybe with family or friends as a social event! Feeling supported is key in continuing to be active.

Your local sports and leisure centres will offer classes , in addition to swimming and use of gym facilities.

Additionally, people have found it helpful to download the GetUBetter app. This is available on Apple and Android devices and is designed to provide you with information about your back pain and help you continue to exercise from the comfort of your own home.

If you would prefer to try other activities or environments the following organisations may be of interest to you.

EXTEND

Gentle exercise classes to music for older people (over-60), to promote health, increase mobility and independence, improve strength, co-ordination and balance. Community based classes throughout the UK provided by trained facilitators for a small fee.

Tel: 01582 832760

Web: www.extend.org.uk

Email: admin@extend.org.uk

Walking for Health

A large network of health walk schemes across England, which offers regular short walks over easy terrain with trained walk leaders. This group encourages more people to become physically active in their local communities.

Tel: 0300 060 2287

Web: www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk

Email: wfhinfo@naturalengland.org.uk

Useful Organisations

Versus Arthritis

This is an excellent resource for information on back, joint pain and arthritis. Many booklets are also available regarding all aspects of disease management.

Tel: 0300 790 0400

Web: <https://www.versusarthritis.org>

Email: enquiries@versusarthritis.org

Arthritis Care

This is a charitable organisation that provides information on managing your condition. Local support groups also run a series of courses and meetings on self-management skills.

Tel: 0207 380 6500

Web: www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Email: info@arthritiscare.org.uk