

BackCare's 40 tips for a healthier back

To keep your back fit and healthy:

- 1. Take regular physical activity**
Regular physical activity is very important in keeping your back, and the rest of your body, fit and healthy. Choose an activity or exercise you enjoy doing
- 2. Mind your posture**
Avoid long periods of being in one position, move around regularly and stretch and exercise your back muscles regularly
- 3. Use correct lifting and handling techniques**
Handling heavy goods can put a big strain on your back. Lift by bending from your knees and not from your back, use manual handling aids when available.
- 4. Avoid being overweight**
Keep a healthy weight to avoid excessive load on your spine
- 5. Stop smoking**
Smoking can increase your chances of developing back pain since it restricts blood flow

When back pain strikes

- 6. Stay Active**
When you experience back pain it is very important to stay active. Prolonged bed rest is often counter-productive in managing back pain
 - 7. Use of medication**
Consider using over-the-counter pain killers when the pain becomes too severe. If you do take them, take them regularly according to the instructions; don't wait until the pain is bad
 - 8. Seeking medical help**
Most back pain disappears within days or weeks. If your pain persists, gets worse or you experience any other symptoms (e.g. feeling unwell) you should see your GP or other qualified healthcare provider
 - 9. Pace yourself and set achievable goals**
Back pain often comes and goes and you may experience flare ups and periods of relatively little pain. You may find that you can extend
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the periods of less pain by pacing yourself and setting realistic goals. Don't try to do everything you have to do when you feel well, but spread your workload over a longer period

10. Hot packs

Try applying a hot pack to the painful area. Hot packs or pads are available in most pharmacies and larger supermarkets

11. Cold packs

Try applying a cold pack to the painful area. Special cold packs are available but a bag of frozen peas works as well. Wrap the cold pack in a towel or cloth

12. Sitting

Sitting can be uncomfortable but by putting a rolled up towel in your lower back, you can make yourself a lot more comfortable. There are also special lumbar supports available that you can use on chairs

13. Stretching

Stretching regularly can reduce your discomfort. Try to incorporate stretches in your daily routine, for example when you get out of bed

Back pain at work

14. Get comfortable when working

Adjust your work environment, i.e. is your computer screen at the right height? Do you have to do (too) much reaching?

15. Lifting and handling goods

When lifting, make sure you bend from the knees and not your back. Carry heavy items close to your body. Seek help for lifting awkward or heavy objects, or lift in stages

16. Take regular breaks

Take regular breaks when doing repetitive work

17. Adapt your work

Discuss with your manager if you can temporarily work different hours, do different tasks or get help with those activities that exacerbate your back pain

18. Taking sick leave

With the help of the above tips, you can avoid going off sick. If you do have to have time off, try to limit your time away from work because the longer you are off, the more difficult it is to return to work

19. Planning

Plan your day carefully so you can alternate sitting with standing/walking or repetitive tasks with other activities.

Back pain at home

20. Adapt your home lay out

Arrange your home in such a way that you can easily reach the things you need

21. Housekeeping

Spread your housekeeping duties over the whole week and don't do it all in one go

22. Stand comfortably

When doing the dishes, brushing your teeth or any other time when you have to stand for some time, you may find it helpful to place one foot on a small step. For example you could open the cupboard and rest one foot on the bottom shelf of the cupboard when standing in front of the sink

23. Beds and mattresses

Choose a higher bed that will make it easier to get in and out when you experience back pain. Choose a mattress that you find comfortable, in general it is true that the heavier you are, the firmer your mattress should be. Avoid second hand mattresses as these are often worn and provide insufficient support

24. Good furniture

To sit comfortably, you may prefer furniture that provides good support and stability and is not too low. Don't sit in one position for too long, fidgeting is good!

25. Shopping

Using a high trolley reduces the need to bend too much. Try carrying your shopping in two smaller bags instead of one big one or go twice to the shop instead of buying everything in one go

Back pain and leisure

26. Exercise regularly

Find a type of exercise that you enjoy and that doesn't result in a sudden increase in pain. Use comfortable, cushioned shoes when walking

27. Watching TV without discomfort

Most people tend to slouch when watching TV; this may exacerbate existing back pain

28. Pacing and prioritising

Make a list of things you have to do and prioritise. Instead of doing all in one go when you are relatively pain free, try to spread the workload and pace yourself

29. Sleeping well

Find a position that gives you minimal discomfort and use pillows to provide extra support. For example you can place a pillow under your knees when sleeping on your back or a pillow between your knees when sleeping on your side. If you really can't sleep – get up for a short while – have a drink and return to bed

30. Back packs

When carrying a load, consider using a back pack worn on both shoulders. This avoids any discomfort from carrying loads asymmetrically

31. Driving

Take regular breaks when having to drive long distances and use a firm seat that gives good support; use an extra lumbar support if needed. An even better option may be to take the train which allows you move around regularly instead of being in one position for a long time

32. Using buses/trains/planes

Take a seat near the aisle so you can get up regularly for a walk and a stretch. Even better try and get a seat with extra leg space so you can stretch a bit more

33. Gardening

The use of long-handed tools can prevent much bending and twisting

34. Use of computers

Browsing the internet or playing computer games have become popular leisure time activities for many. To reduce discomfort when using your computer, you should set up your monitor at eye height, make sure you can easily reach the keyboard and mouse and use a chair that provides good support

35. Relaxation

Learn relaxation techniques or find activities that you find enjoyable and relaxing.



Finding treatments, products and more information

36. Finding treatments

There are many different treatments available to help you with your back pain. Contact healthcare providers via BackCare's database of professional members on the BackCare website.

37. Finding products

There are also many different products available; try to find something that works for you by weighing the possible benefits with the possible risks or costs. Find products in BackCare's database of corporate supporters on the BackCare website

38. Self management

Although many treatments and products can help control back pain, you will have a better chance of controlling back pain by also using the above tips. Your GP can also refer you to NHS-run Pain management programmes and to the Expert Patient Programme

39. Finding more information

BackCare has a range of different publications, factsheets and a comprehensive website with more information on various aspects of back care and back pain. Go to www.backcare.org.uk or call the office on 0208 977 5474 to order any of our publications

40. Find support and share your stories on pain forums on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn

twitter: @therealbackcare| **facebook:** /back.care1| **LinkedIn:** /backcare

At BackCare we believe that there is always something you can do to help you with your back pain. More information can be found on www.backcare.org.uk or by calling the BackCare Office on 0208 977 5474

Please note that the above provided information should be used as guidance only and should not replace professional medical advice that you may have received. If in doubt, you should contact your GP or other qualified healthcare professional.
