

# 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**

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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**

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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](http://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](http://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.

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