

Low Back Pain and Sciatica

THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE

Most back pain settles within 4 to 6 weeks, and staying active is what speeds it up.

Bed rest beyond a day or two makes back pain **worse**, not better — muscles weaken, joints stiffen and the pain lasts longer. Keep moving within the limits of your pain.

Most back pain does not need an MRI, and scan findings often do not match the pain. We will scan you if there is a reason to.

The first two weeks

- **Stay as active as you can.** Walk short distances often. Continue light daily activities and, if possible, work.
- **Avoid** prolonged sitting, bending forward, twisting, and lifting anything heavy.
- **Heat** (hot water bag, hot shower) usually helps muscle spasm. Some prefer ice in the first two days.
- Take the painkillers we have given **regularly for a few days**, not only when the pain becomes severe.
- Sleep on your side with a pillow between the knees, or on your back with a pillow under the knees.
- **Get out of bed by log rolling** — roll onto your side keeping shoulders and hips together, drop the legs over the edge, push up with your arms.

SCIATICA — PAIN GOING DOWN THE LEG

This means a nerve is irritated, usually by a disc. It typically causes pain below the knee, sometimes with pins and needles.

Most sciatica improves without surgery, but it takes longer than simple back pain — often 6 to 12 weeks. Nerve-pain tablets, physiotherapy and time are the usual course. Keep walking; avoid sitting for long periods, which is often the worst position.

GO TO HOSPITAL IMMEDIATELY IF YOU DEVELOP

Difficulty passing urine, or loss of control of urine or stool · **numbness around the back passage, genitals or inner thighs** (the area that would touch a saddle) · **weakness in both legs** · a foot that drops and cannot be lifted

These are rare but are a surgical emergency. **Do not wait until morning.**

Also tell us about: back pain with fever · unexplained weight loss · pain that is constant and worse at night · a history of cancer or tuberculosis · back pain after a significant fall

Search: low back pain, sciatica, slipped disc, lumbar pain self care

