

Returning to active daily life

You probably belong to the majority of people with acute back or neck pain who recover spontaneously within one month or thereabouts. Consequently, the chances are that, after a few days, you will want to get moving and return to your everyday life.

At this stage, it is important to follow the basic principles of back care (see *Chapter 8*). The tissues are still in the healing phase and will respond positively on normal movement. At times, you may feel stiffness, perhaps even marked discomfort, but remember that “hurt does not necessarily mean harm” as you get your joints and muscles working normally again.

Consulting your doctor

If this is your first attack of back pain, consult your doctor. Usually, back pain is not an emergency, but do not expect an instant cure or instant relief. Your doctor will probably ask the following questions. Try to answer as fully and clearly as possible to help him make an accurate diagnosis.

- What were you doing when the pain started?
- Did the pain come on suddenly or did it build up gradually?
- Where do you feel it and where does it radiate?
- Is the pain sharp, dull, heavy, burning?
- What positions or movements relieve it, and which aggravate it?

Moving: respect the pain but do not fear it

By avoiding bending or sitting down for the first two hours of the day, sufferers of chronic back pain can significantly reduce their symptoms.

The advice given here may prevent painful twinges in the joints in your lower back. With practice, the movements can become fluent. Continue moving in this way, even when your back is not painful.

While your back is painful, avoid wearing clothes that are difficult to put on or take off, such as tight jeans. Use slip-on shoes rather than lace-ups.



Getting dressed

Avoid sitting down and bending over to put your clothes on, as this strains your back. Roll your clothes up so that you can put your arms or legs through quickly and easily. Stand on one leg (lean against a wall if necessary) and raise your knee to dress your lower half (*left*).

Getting dressed lying down

Pull your knees up to your chest to get the clothes over your feet, then straighten your legs as you pull the clothes up.

- Is the pain constant?
- Do you feel any numbness or pins and needles?
- Have you had similar attacks before?
- What kind of job do you do?
- What daily actions involve your back?

Describing your pain

If you can describe your pain, and its intensity, the doctor can make a more accurate diagnosis. Many adjectives can express the quality and severity of pain. Some describe the physical sensation: sharp, pulsating, shooting, stabbing. Perhaps your pain is gnawing, pulling, burning, searing or stinging. Adjectives that reflect the feeling associated with pain may be more descriptive: tiring, wretched,

sickening, miserable, frightful. Others can express the overall intensity of the pain you feel: dreadful, vicious, unbearable, terrible or torturing.

Different types of pain have different causes, according to the tissues involved. A general, dull ache is often due to tense muscles or an irritation from deep within the spinal joints. A sharp and shooting pain may be caused by a pinched nerve and, as with sciatica and brachialgia, it may not be felt at the site of injury. A sharp but clearly defined pain which does not spread to any other sites comes from pinched tissues such as the skin or the lining on a bone.

A diffuse, burning sensation is often caused by a disturbance of the sympathetic nervous system,

Getting out of bed

Bring your knees up to about hip level and roll over on to your side. Lower your feet to the floor and use your arms to push yourself up into a sitting position. Reverse this procedure to get back into bed.



Getting in and out of an armchair

To sit down in a chair, stand with your back to the chair and your feet a shoulder width apart, close to the edge of the chair. Keep your back straight and lower yourself slowly. Place your hands on the arms of the chair as soon as you can.

To get out of a chair, first bring your feet as close as you can to the edge of the chair, if possible under the edge. At the same time, bring your buttocks vertically above your feet. Keep your knees a shoulder width apart for good balance. Keep your spine straight, and place your hands on the arms of the chair. Slowly straighten your legs and push yourself out of the chair with your arms (*right*).

