Getting Back to Normal After Low Back Pain: Care Instructions

Overview

Almost everyone has low back pain at some time. The good news is that most low back pain will go away in a few days or weeks with some basic self-care.

Some people are afraid that doing too much may make their pain worse. In the past, people stayed in bed, thinking this would help their backs. Now doctors think that, in most cases, getting back to your normal activities is good for your back, as long as you avoid doing things that make your pain worse.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

Ease back into daily activities

- For the first day or two of pain, take it easy. But as soon as you can, get back to your normal daily life and activities.
- Get gentle exercise, such as walking. Movement keeps your spine flexible and helps your muscles stay strong.
- If you are an athlete, return to your activity carefully. Choose a low-impact option until your pain is under control.

Avoid or change activities that cause pain

- Try to avoid too much bending, heavy lifting, or reaching. These movements put extra stress on your back.
- In bed, try lying on your side with a pillow between your knees. Or lie on your back on the floor with a pillow under your knees.
- When you sit, place a small pillow, a rolled-up towel, or a lumbar roll in the curve of your back for extra support.
- Try putting one foot up on a stool or changing positions every few minutes if you have to stand still for a period of time.

Pay attention to body mechanics and posture

Body mechanics are the way you use your body. Posture is the way you sit or stand.

- Take extra care when you lift. When you must lift, bend your knees and keep your back straight. Avoid twisting, and keep the load close to your body.
- Stand or sit tall, with your shoulders back and your stomach pulled in to support your back.

Get support when you need it

- Let people know when you need a helping hand. Get family members or friends to help out with tasks you can't do right now.
- Be honest with your doctor about how the pain affects you.
- If you've had to take time off work, talk to your doctor and boss about a gradual return-to-work plan. Find out if there are other ways you could do your job to avoid hurting your back again.

Reduce stress

Worrying about the pain can cause you to tense the muscles in your lower back. This in turn causes more pain. Here are a few things you can do to relax your mind and your muscles:

- Take 10 to 15 minutes to sit quietly and breathe deeply. Try to focus only on your breathing. If you can't keep thoughts away, think about things that make you feel good.
- Get involved in your favorite hobby, or try something new.
- Talk to a friend, read a book, or listen to your favorite music.
- Find a counselor you like and trust. Talk openly and honestly about your problems. Be willing to make some changes.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You are unable to move a leg at all.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new or worse symptoms in your legs, belly, or buttocks. Symptoms may include:
  - Numbness or tingling.
  - Weakness.
  - Pain.
- You lose bladder or bowel control.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You have a fever, lose weight, or don't feel well.
- You are not getting better as expected.

Where can you learn more?

Go to https://www.healthwise.net/patiented

Enter **N687** in the search box to learn more about **"Getting Back to Normal After Low Back Pain: Care Instructions".**

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