

Back Care:

Back pain is the nation's leading cause of disability. 80% of the population will suffer from back pain at some point in their lives. Only 5% of this is serious back pain requiring medical intervention.

Most back pains occur mainly in the small of the back or the lumbar area, but can be found anywhere along the spine. More information on back pain can be found on the backcare national association website:
<http://www.backcare.org.uk/>

What causes back pain?

Back pain is mainly caused by an accumulation of poor posture, sitting or standing in the wrong position and lifting objects incorrectly. It is also common in pregnancy.

Prevention of back pain means making adjustments on the way we sit, stand, lift, at home, with the kids, at the shops, in the car, in bed.

At work, try the following:

- Check and improve your posture, especially if you spend extended periods of time in front of your computer.
- Change position often and stretch regularly
- Avoid slouching
- If you stand for long periods, have a low stool available so that occasionally you can rest one foot on it and this vary your weight between each leg and foot
- Adopt good lifting techniques, by bending your knees and making your legs do the work; keep the weight close to your body and do not twist as you lift; get help if you need it.
- If you drive a motor vehicle, do adjust your seat correctly to keep your back well supported to achieve a good posture
- Exercise regularly to strengthen the back muscles. The University Centre for Sports and Exercise provide suitable classes:
<http://www.sport.ed.ac.uk/>
- Lose weight if necessary

What happens if I get back pain?

Activity is the way to recovery. The old fashioned treatment of bed rest for back pain is actually bad for your back, as trying to reduce the pain by avoiding movement slows recovery and can lead to long term back pain.

Simple advice to follow:

- Continue with normal activities and stay active. Do not avoid activity simply as a way of avoiding the pain.
- Take regular painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to ease the pain and allow you to get moving again. Cold pack or heat treatment can also help.
- Return to work as soon as possible. If you think your back pain is exacerbated by factors in the workplace, please contact the Occupational Health Unit for advice. Occupational.Health@ed.ac.uk tel 650 8192
- See your GP if the pain persists, suddenly gets worse or is not relieved by ordinary painkillers. More about the need for referral is available from the Working Backs Scotland website <http://www.workingbacksscotland.com/>
- Manipulation safely carried out by qualified professionals such as physiotherapist, osteopaths etc can also help, and should ideally be initiated within the first 6 weeks.

Sources of Guidance and Advice

- <http://www.backcare.org.uk/index2.php>
- <http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/index.htm>
- <http://www.workingbacksscotland.com/>