



PREVENTION. CARE. RECOVERY.

Te Kaporeihana Āwhina Hunga Whara

Getting over back pain

*A practical guide to dealing
with back pain and getting
on with your life*



Short-term back pain is very common – eight out of 10 New Zealanders have to deal with back pain at some stage in their lives.

The good news is that back pain doesn't necessarily mean you've damaged your back. Most back pain is not due to serious disease or injury.

In general, the sooner you get back on your feet and doing most of your usual activities, the sooner your back will feel better. The initial pain should settle down within a few days or weeks and can be managed with ordinary painkillers.

Although it may take a while for the pain to go away completely, the long-term outlook is good. Here are a few things you can do to help speed up your recovery.

Important: *There's a lot you can do to manage your back pain yourself, but do see your doctor urgently if you have any of these symptoms:*

- *Numbness in the groin or anal area*
- *Numbness, pins and needles, or weakness in both legs*
- *Loss of bladder or bowel control*
- *Difficulty walking.*

Getting back on your feet



Keeping active is often best for your back.

Stay active: the best plan is to stay active and get back to doing your usual activities as soon as possible. Staying active will mean faster improvement, less time off work, and fewer long-term problems. In the short term, you may have to make slight changes to the way you do things to manage your back pain.

Avoid bed rest: research shows that you should avoid bed rest. Not using your back can do more harm than good.

Sitting: get up and stretch regularly. Choose a chair that isn't too low or soft and try adding some support in the small of your back.

Driving: take regular breaks – get out of the car, walk about, and stretch. Try adding some support in the small of your back.

Lifting: avoid lifting more than you need to and use a technique that is comfortable.

Sports/exercise: in the early stages it may be best to avoid contact sports that might put a heavy load on your back. Walking and swimming are great ways of staying active while managing back pain.



Back yourself

What you do and think can have big effects

Build yourself back up: aim to increase your activities gradually until you're back to your normal levels of work and play.

Manage your pain: take painkillers regularly rather than 'toughing it out'. Ask your health professional or pharmacist for the most suitable kind of painkiller and ensure you are getting enough pain relief to stay active without too much discomfort.

Sleep well: it's important to get a good night's sleep. Take painkillers an hour before going to bed and experiment with different positions to find the one most comfortable for sleeping.

Take control: stay positive, don't stress, keep active, and very soon your back pain will be a thing of the past. Positive thinking and the support of friends and family can make a real difference – people who get better quickly often expect to get better quickly.

If your back pain doesn't ease within a few weeks or feels like it's getting worse, see your health professional.

Work it out

Staying at work will assist your mental and physical recovery. Making some simple changes at work will make the job easier while managing your back pain.

Minimise time off: talk to your employer and health professional about ways to keep time off work to a minimum. If you can't yet handle a full day at work, going for even part of the day can be very worthwhile. Staying at work keeps you involved in the workplace and helps you get over your back pain quicker.

Change the way you do things: talk to your employer and health professional about modifying any work activities that you find difficult. Limiting your duties or reducing your workload for the first few weeks may help lower the risk of further pain.

HabitAtWork: this is an educational tool promoting self-help and problem solving for preventing and managing discomfort, pain and injury at work. It includes a workstation assessment and a full set of exercises suitable for your workplace. Go to **www.habitatwork.co.nz** to find out more.



Prevent pain coming back

Back pain can recur although you can do a lot to help prevent it.

Get fit: you have a better chance of preventing back pain recurring if you stay fit. Regular exercise helps to strengthen your muscles and bones, keeps you flexible, and reduces pain through the release of natural chemicals.



ActiveSmart: this is our free online training programme that you can tailor to your needs to help you to build up your fitness safely. It even includes a nutritional plan and email reminders. Go to www.activesmart.co.nz to find out more.

You know what to do: the knowledge and methods you have gained from coping with your back pain will still work if it recurs. Remember, recovery can take time, so stay positive, keep active, and you'll soon be back on track. If you are concerned that your back pain has come back, talk to your health professional. For more information on dealing with back pain, call **0800 101 996** or visit www.acc.co.nz



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