

MANAGING YOUR BACK PAIN/RELATED LEG PAIN

ADVICE FOR PATIENTS

THE FACTS

- Most back problems resulting in leg pain settle with time.
- The spine is strong.
- Backs are designed to move.
- Bed rest is not a treatment for back/leg problems, but you may need to rest if the pain is very severe.
- It is very common for the pain in the leg to be more severe than the pain in the back.
- Stress and tension can increase the pain you feel.
- The pain can be very severe, and you may need to reduce your activities at first.
- X-rays and scans are rarely required for leg pain

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

- If you are taking painkillers or anti-inflammatories, take them regularly, as prescribed.
- Don't wait for the pain to get out of control before you take them. You may want to speak to a pharmacist or your GP to get advice about which medication is best for you.
- You may need to rest if the pain is very severe, but try to move about a little, as the pain allows.
- If you are resting, try to find a position that eases the leg pain.
- Bed rest is not a treatment, but you may have to lie down if the pain is severe. Try to get up for short periods as soon as your pain allows and gradually increase the time you are up for. You should be up and about by two weeks at the latest, even if you still have some pain. If you cannot manage this then you should consult your doctor.
- Try to stay as active as the pain allows, but respect the pain in your leg. Don't try to beat the pain by continuing with an activity which makes it worse. Instead, change position for a period of time and see if that helps.
- Gradually increase your activity level, as you feel able. Slowly start to introduce normal activities, aiming to do a little more as each week passes.
- Gentle walking and swimming are good activities to start with.

WARNING SIGNS

If you have severe pain which is getting worse over several weeks, or if you are unwell with back pain, you should consult your doctor.

The following symptoms are very rare, but if you suddenly develop any of them, you should consult your doctor straightaway.

- Difficulty passing or controlling urine.
- Numbness around your back passage or genitals.
- Numbness, pins and needles, or weakness in both legs.
- Unsteadiness on your feet.

www.scottishbacks.co.uk
www.nhshealthquality.org