

Comments, Compliments, Complaints

Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust offer high quality services and aim to be as helpful as possible. If however you are dissatisfied by our service then we would like to know so that we can make improvements.

Please contact either:

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Tel: **0800 011 6113**

10am to 2pm, Monday to Friday

Messages can be left outside these hours

Email: pals.hchs@nhs.net

Patient Experience Team

Tel: **01707 388036**

9.30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday

Messages can be left outside these hours

Email: complaints.hchs@nhs.net

Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust

Units 1A & 1B
Howard Court
14 Tewin Road
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL7 1BW

Telephone: 01707 388000

Fax: 01707 321840

Email: communications@hct.nhs.uk

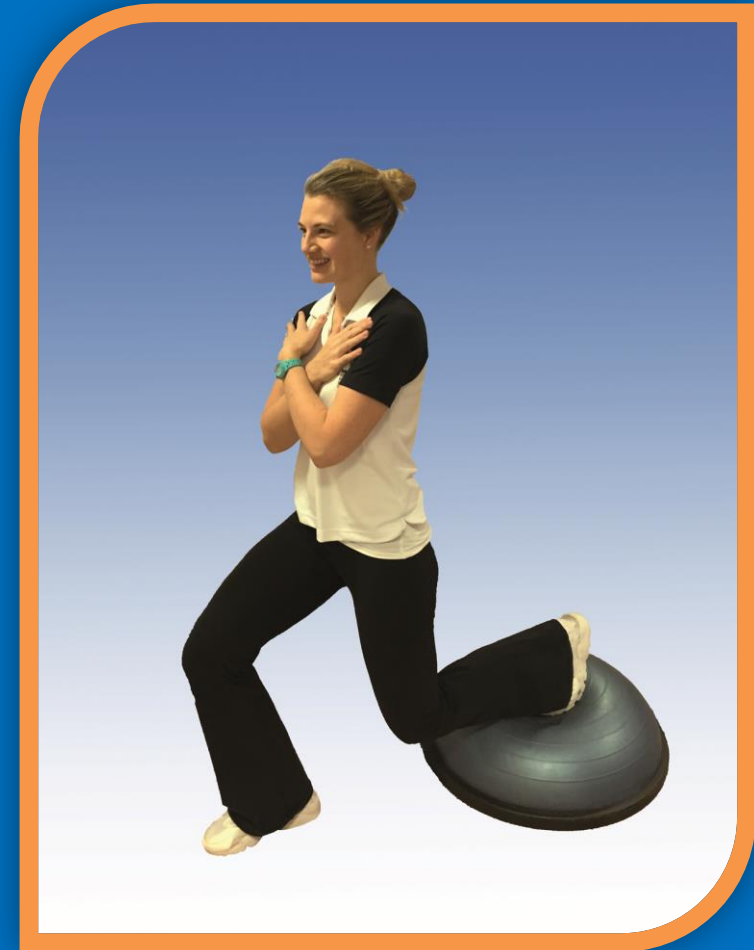
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care for you

Lower Back Pain

Self-Management Information for Patients



*This leaflet has been produced by staff working in our Outpatient
Physiotherapy teams, part of our Musculoskeletal Service*

Lower back pain is one of the most commonly reported musculoskeletal problems in the UK

Half of all people experience lower back pain at some point in their lives. Most back pain is a result of simple strains and sprains with the majority of people reporting an improvement in their condition within two weeks. Research suggests that 84% of back pain episodes settle completely within six weeks.

Back Pain Myths

There are many myths around back pain, which if believed can delay your recovery:

- **'Movement is bad for my back':** The opposite is true. Gentle, regular movement and keeping active has been shown to improve back pain.
- **'Pain equals damage':** Recent research tells us there is more to pain than the mechanics of the spine. How we feel pain varies from person to person. For example, how well we sleep, our lifestyle, stress and fitness levels all have an impact.
- **'A scan will show me what's wrong':** Interpreting scans and relating them to symptoms is a lot more difficult than you might think. We all have natural changes to our spine that happen over time, and are not always linked to pain. One study that used only people with no history of back pain found 30% of 20 year olds and 60% of 50 year olds had a disc bulge, but none of these patients were experiencing pain.
- **'My back is out of alignment':** There are many misleading terms used in everyday life that can sound a bit scary. Be reassured that the spine is an incredibly strong, stable structure and that abnormal positioning of the bones is very rare.

It's easy to see how these myths started – many of them were thought to be correct in the past, but have now been proved incorrect by new research.

But these myths create fear, which can cause people to stop doing many of the activities they need to do to address the problem.

What can I do to ease my lower back pain?

There are many things that you can do to help manage your low back pain:

- Try to break tasks down into smaller pieces and take regular breaks, so that your pain level doesn't get too high and you don't get frustrated. Clinicians often call this 'pacing'. For example, vacuuming one room then having a rest, rather than the whole house.
- Increasing exercise has strong links to improved pain, particularly cardiovascular activities which increase your heart rate. Walking is a good start.

- Simple muscle creams, heat and ice packs can help ease your back pain in the short term.
- Our backs are designed to move. We have 17 moving vertebrae in our backs, and that doesn't even include our neck. Keep your back moving with gentle exercises, like the ones shown below. Try them a few times a day.

Simple exercises to try at home:

1. Lying on your back, hug one knee to your chest. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10-20 times, with each leg.



2. Lying on your back, slowly roll your knees from side to side. Repeat 10-20 times, each direction.



3. Lying on your back, slowly curl your pelvis up from the bed. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10-20 times.



Remember, exercise is a great way to manage and reduce back pain. It can be swimming, cycling, using a gym or standing up and sitting down in a chair.

What you do isn't important – just make sure you keep it up!