
Back pain management programme

Principles and benefits of exercise

It has long been recognised the importance of exercise to manage many health conditions, including back pain:

"The wise, for health, on exercise depend..." from: Honoured Kinsman by: John Dryden, Poet Laureate, 1660

During this programme, help will be given on how to design your own exercise programme to improve your physical fitness.

What is exercise?

Exercise is an exertion of the body or mind. When of the right sort it can make an enormous contribution to your well being, but exercise of the wrong sort can be painful and harmful to your health.

There are three main elements to exercise, which are the three 'S's:

- **strength, stamina and suppleness.**

The body needs all three types in order to function properly. When you plan an exercise regime it is important to consider the three 'S's, although they often overlap.

Your exercise programme

Throughout the programme we encourage you to be in control of your own programme. You decide what exercises you try and how many with our help in planning your exercises, setting your own goals and monitoring your own progress.

The aim is to find an exercise level you can do on both good and bad days, so don't expect to progress quickly.

- Do the exercises slowly, smoothly and without jerking.
- If a particular exercise causes an increase in pain during or after the session, make the movement smaller so that you can still do the exercise rather than avoiding it. Or, ask for help.
- Do remember to stick to **your** goals, and don't be tempted to try too many.

How pain affects activity

Pain causes us to avoid normal movement and everyday activity. If something hurts to move, we keep it still.

In the initial stages of an injury the pain makes us rest and allows healing to start. However with long term pain, we may be experiencing pain even though there is no healing process going on. This makes us avoid movement, but in this case, keeping still may cause more harm than good and may actually cause more pain.

Exercise and movement can help in the following ways:

Suppleness

By gently stretching the soft tissues around the joints you will decrease the risk of sprain resulting from sudden movement. You may also achieve the range of movement needed for everyday activities.

Strength

During exercise you work muscles that may have been working inefficiently or not at all. The muscles are then able to protect and support the joints, putting less strain on the body.

Stamina

We must build up stamina so we have the power to keep doing an activity without fatiguing, thereby again reducing the risk of injury.

Better circulation

Exercise improves the performance of your heart and lungs, therefore keeping the joints and muscles healthy.

Good posture

Good posture puts less strain on the joints

Normal weight

Through regular exercise you increase your metabolic rate, thereby burning off extra calories and reducing your body fat store. This creates less strain on your joints and body.

Co-ordination

If movement is smooth and safe, it enables us to have good balance.

Exercise decreases pain information by closing 'the pain gate' and gives a feeling of well being, which may be due to natural chemicals released from the brain.

Exercise also gives you

- Stronger heart and lungs.
- Stronger and firmer bones.
- Keeps you in better shape.
- Helps you relax and sleep better.
- Gives you more energy and a better self image.
- Reduces the risk of heart disease and strokes by better control of blood fats and blood pressure.
- Helps prevent osteoporosis
- Reduces backache and other joint pain and stiffness.
- Helps control stress
- Improves the immune system.