

Back pain without leg pain

What causes back pain?

The discs in the spine act like shock absorbers between the bones of the spine. The most common cause of back pain is a crack in one of these discs.

A crack allows fluid from the middle of the disc to squeeze into the outer, pain sensitive part of the disc. This movement of fluid results in muscle spasm in the large back muscles. This spasm leads to pain and stiffness in your back.

Light activity will not further injure the disc or other structures in the back. In fact, activity will encourage its repair. Over time the inflammation will settle although unfortunately recurrence is common. Pain does not mean you are doing damage.

Some tips

- Treat attacks of back pain as muscle spasm by stretching and light activity.
- Avoid bed rest. Whatever other treatment you have, you need to stay active and return to normal activity as soon as possible.
- Your back pain is secondary to the muscle spasm and you need to manage the pain with movement. Increased tension in the muscles can increase the pain and sometimes just the fear of pain is enough to increase muscle tension. The worst thing you can do for your back is to be too careful.
- Mobilise your spine through light activity as much as you can. In the early stages, no formal exercise program is usually necessary.
- Try to walk without a limp and be as flexible as possible.
- Avoid work where your back muscles are kept still, such as prolonged bending over a table.
- Avoid lifting and twisting at the same time.

- Lift heavy objects using the strength of your thigh muscles and keeping your back straight. At other times however do not be afraid to use your back.

Pain relief

- Paracetamol is safe. The usual dose for more severe pain is two tablets four times a day with a maximum dose of eight in a day.
- If the pain is not settling with Paracetamol and activity, or if you are getting leg pain, please talk to your GP.

Getting back to work

- To return to work as quickly as possible your doctor will need to know what you do at work. Discuss your work with your doctor, if you have not already, at your follow up visit.
- Sometimes modification to your duties can get you back to work quicker.