

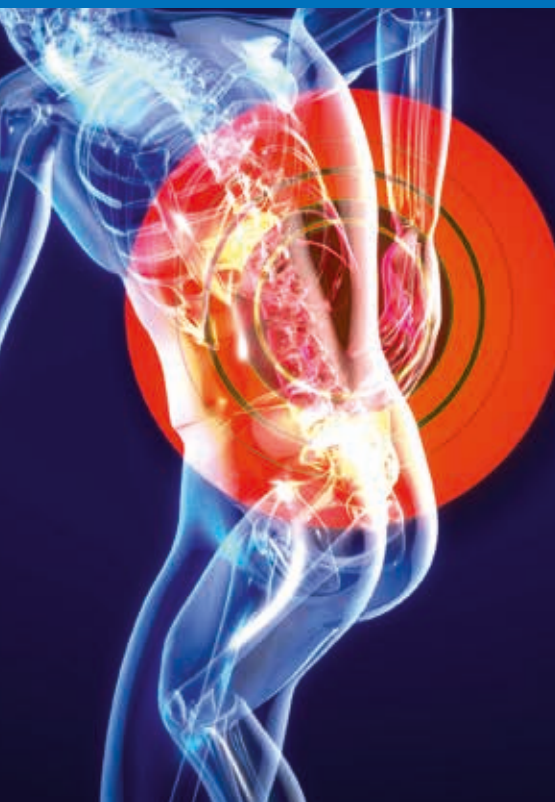
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An integrated MSK service for Mid-Nottinghamshire

Nottinghamshire Integrated Care System

Lower Back & Leg Pain

Information for patients



Information in this booklet is intended to be used as a guide. It gives you an idea about how *Lower Back & Leg Pain* can be managed. However, it should be remembered that every case is different, and symptoms and management can vary from person to person.

Low Back & Leg Pain

Sprains and strains of the back can cause ‘mechanical lower back pain’ and can sometimes refer pain and symptoms down the leg. Pain travelling down the leg from the back can be caused by stiffness and inflammation of joints in the lower back, or irritation of nerves.

Your health care professional will be able to perform a thorough examination to gain a better understanding of your condition and the treatment options that will help you to achieve your personal goals.

In most cases, MRI scans are not needed to make a diagnosis. Your health care professional can discuss if a scan is needed. Scans often report things such as disc bulges; these are common findings in a lot of people with or without pain or symptoms. Scans do not predict how much pain you feel or indicate how well you will respond to treatment. If you have had a scan, ask your health care professional to talk through the report with you to help you understand the findings.

Lower Back & Leg Pain will normally get better over time. This booklet contains information about different treatments that are available. Your health care professional can explain your treatment options with you further.

What is Lower Back & Leg Pain?

Mechanical back pain, sprains and strains of the lower back can result in pain referring from the back and travelling down the leg. Pain travelling down the leg from the back can be also be caused by stiffness and inflammation of joints, or irritation of nerves.

These nerves can become irritated for several reasons that may include stiffness of the joints, tension in the muscles, and/or a disc bulge(s).

When the nerve is irritated it can cause pain, a tingling ‘pins and needles’ sensation, numbness and/or weakness. The level of nerve irritation, or how your body responds, may mean your leg pain presents differently.

Why me?

There may or may not be a specific reason or cause for your pain. It is thought that *Lower Back & Leg Pain* is more common in people who:

- Are not physically active
- Are obese
- Are under emotional or physical stress

- Perform an activity that you are not used to
- Do not sleep well
- Smoke.

Your health care professional will ask you questions, which will help to determine what treatment is most suitable for you.

Symptoms

People with *Lower Back Pain & Leg Pain* typically complain of a 'toothache' type pain or sharp pain in the lower back.

Patients often refer to this area as the hip. You can get lower back pain with or without leg pain. Lower Back & Leg Pain can come with other symptoms such as

tingling, numbness and/or weakness in one or both legs.

There are usually certain movements that make your pain feel worse; these will vary between each patient. Once you move out of this position, your pain may improve over minutes or hours.

Is it serious?

Lower Back & Leg Pain can be painful and cause you to struggle with your normal activities, but it is not usually serious or an emergency.

Cauda Equina Syndrome & Spinal Myelopathy Symptoms

These are rare conditions where the spinal cord gets compressed. If you have, or start to get, any symptoms listed below, you should seek urgent medical attention via an Emergency Department (A&E):

- Problems going to the toilet including a new feeling of wanting to empty your bladder but being unable to, continuation of emptying your bladder when you thought you had finished or,

- incontinence of bladder or bowels
- Tingling or numbness to your genitals, back passage (anus) or upper, inner thighs
- Large reduction in strength and/or coordination of arms and hands, and/or legs
- Unexplained balance problems or unsteadiness in your legs.

Diagnosis & Investigations

Lower Back & Leg Pain is diagnosed from the signs and symptoms that you describe. Assessment of the lumbar spine and nerve function by health care professionals may help to inform this diagnosis. If the diagnosis is unclear or injections are being considered, an MRI scan of the lumbar spine may be arranged. This is aimed to look at the 'nerve roots'; however, there is often not a strong link between the severity of changes seen on an MRI and the amount of pain you are in.

Will it get better?

Lower Back & Leg Pain often gets better on its own, with time.

In most cases pain relief from your GP, and physiotherapy is the first line of treatment. Physiotherapists offer advice, education, exercises, and in some cases, hands-on therapy to help with your symptoms. Regaining your normal movement is important to help ease your symptoms. For most people the pain does not come back, however for others it might.

Management

Below are further ways that may help you in the management of your Lower Back & Leg Pain:

Keep active

Try to keep as active as possible, with your normal activities or exercise. Being generally active will help to keep your body moving and reduce any stiffness. Normal movement, exercise and activity will not cause harm if you work within manageable pain levels. If you can work, do some hobbies and be physically active on some level, you are more likely to get better sooner.

If you don't currently do any general exercise it would be helpful to consider starting something gentle and build on it slowly as you feel more confident. If you have any other conditions that limit your ability to exercise, please discuss this with your health professional.

MEDICATION FOR PAIN CONTROL

Controlling your pain allows you to continue to function and helps you cope. Your GP may have already discussed medication to help with your pain and the correct ways to take pain relief. They may recommend that you take it as a short course rather than 'as and when' the pain is bad. This often includes non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen, paracetamol or Zapain. Anti-inflammatory gels can also be trialled. Please always read the instructions before using these products.

If you have nerve pain, your Health Care Professional may also discuss additional medication, which specifically targets nerve pain.

OTHER PAIN CONTROL OPTIONS

Some people may find relief with heat or ice packs, gels or a TENS machine. These may be helpful in the short-term and help you with physiotherapy exercises.

PACING

Whilst the pain is limiting your activities it is important to find a balance between doing too little, or too much, of what is causing you pain. This is a balancing act and it is called pacing. Take regular breaks from activities that trigger your pain and do other activities that are less bothersome. This is an important part of helping yourself during this time. As your symptoms settle you will find you can start doing a little bit more.

ADVICE

There is a link between stress, anxiety and depression and on-going back and leg pain, so you may find it useful to address these if they affect you. Research shows exercise, relaxation and/or social activities can help with reducing stress.

There is a link between poor sleep and ongoing pain. You may find it useful to address this if it affects you. The NHS website has useful links on how to get a good night of sleep.

FURTHER MANAGEMENT

Do not worry if you do not see improvements straight away – remember, time is often a very important factor. Some people with *Low Back & Leg Pain* may be referred to a Pain Clinic where additional treatments, alongside physiotherapy may be discussed with you.

In very rare cases and where all other treatments have not worked, surgery may be indicated. A spinal surgeon would discuss this option with you.

EXERCISES



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EXERCISE 1

Back flexion:

- Sit with your feet firmly on the floor with your knees slightly wider than your shoulders
- Round your back and bend forward keeping your neck and shoulders relaxed
- Repeat the above 5-10 times.



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EXERCISE 2

Back extension:

- Standing with your feet hip width apart place your palms on your lower back above your buttocks on your lower back
- Open your chest and lean backwards
- Return to the starting position
- Repeat 5-10 mins.

EXERCISES



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EXERCISE 3

Mini squats from standing:

- Holding onto a table or other flat surface and standing upright, place your feet hip width apart
- Pointing your toes out slightly, bend your knees and stick your bottom backwards, keeping your chest up and your eyes facing forwards
- Return to the upright position
- Repeat the above 5-10 times.



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EXERCISE 4

Knee rolls:

- Lie on your back with your knees together and bent with your arms by your side
- Slowly roll your knees from side to side while keeping your upper body still
- Repeat the above 5-10 times.

EXERCISES



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EXERCISE 5

Stretch:

- Lie on your back with your legs straight along the floor
- Using the opposite arm, bring one knee up to your chest
- Pull this knee over and up towards the shoulder of the arm you're using
- You should feel a stretch in your buttock and lower back
- Hold this position for 20 seconds and repeat on the opposite leg
- Repeat the above three times on each leg.