

Lower back pain



What is lower back pain?

Low back pain is very common. So common, in fact, that most (80%) Australian adults will experience at least one episode of low back pain during their lifetime. Although often very painful, most low back pain is not caused by a serious problem and will resolve with some simple care. Physical activity is an important part of that care.

Occasionally, however, low back pain can be caused by serious disease or damage to the tissues of the back. You should seek advice from a health care practitioner as soon as possible if your back pain:

- occurs after a traumatic event, such as a car accident or a fall
- wakes you during the night
- does not reduce or change, no matter how you move or change position
- accompanies numbness, tingling, or 'pins and needles' in your bottom, legs or feet
- accompanies changes to your bowel or bladder control.

How does exercise help with lower back pain?

Exercise is great medicine for lower back pain, with no specific type being the best. Just stay as active as you can, allowing for the restrictions in movement that may come with pain. If you enjoy gardening, then staying active may mean pottering in your garden, even if heavy jobs such as digging or pruning are too much for you. If you run marathons, staying active may mean continuing training but reducing the distances you run each week.

Also, while you are in pain, staying active prevents loss of physical fitness, muscle strength and cardiorespiratory function. Staying active therefore helps you ensure that other aspects of your health do not decline too.

What type of exercise is best for lower back pain?

Accredited exercise physiologists can help you plan a suitable graduated/strengthening training program in your preferred form of exercise. Your spine and the surrounding muscles are designed for movement. It is important you seek assistance with planning exercise if you have had multiple episodes of low back pain, because the back muscles can respond differently after repeated bouts of back pain.

- **Graduated training** to keep physically improving, your exercise program must become increasingly more difficult; this is called graduated training. For example if you stayed active by walking, to gain further health benefits you now need to walk further or faster, walk up hills, or carry extra weights.
- **Strengthening exercises**, particularly in the small muscles that stabilise the lower back, does not return automatically when low back pain eases. To regain this strength, you may need to do some specific strengthening exercises, with graduated difficulty to progressively increase strength.

Always seek professional advice from an Accredited Exercise Physiologist. Find one here: www.essa.org.au/find-aep