

BUCKS CHIROPRACTIC CLINIC

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Back Pain Advice Booklet



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Back Pain Facts

- Back pain will affect 80% of us at some point in our lives and half of people who experience an episode of back pain will have another episode within 2 years.
- Back pain is the 3rd most common reason to visit your GP and costs the economy millions each year.
- Even a minor back sprain can be very painful and alarming.

However, the good news is:

- Chiropractic treatment can help.
- Evidence supports the use of Chiropractic treatment for acute (sudden onset) and chronic (long-term) back pain.
- There are lots of things you can do to help yourself.
- Most back pain improves within days.
- The vast major of back pain is not due to serious disease.
- Very few back problems ever need surgery.

What is Chiropractic?

Chiropractic is a primary healthcare profession specialising in the diagnosis, treatment and management of conditions related to joints, bones, muscles and nerves (the neuro-musculoskeletal system). Chiropractors treat all areas of the body, concentrating particularly on **back pain and spinal problems**.

As well as back pain, scientific research has shown Chiropractic to be an effective treatment for:

- **neck pain**
- **headaches**
- **shoulder/elbow pain**
- **hip/knee pain**
- **arthritic pain**
- **plantar fasciitis**



Chiropractors have to complete ongoing training each year to make sure they provide the best treatment available.

Chiropractic treatment aims to reduce pain and increase mobility. Chiropractors provide a 'package of care' tailored to each patient's specific needs.

Treatment is based around 'hands on' manual therapy including precise, specific joint manipulation or 'adjustments', soft tissue techniques e.g. massage, medical acupuncture and other interventions such as ultrasound.

Chiropractors will also give you exercises and advice on day to day activities, to maximise the speed of your recovery and prevent recurrences.

Chiropractic is the fastest growing healthcare profession in the UK and is regulated by the General Chiropractic Council (GCC). All Chiropractors have undergone a minimum full-time 4 years training and must have adequate insurance. It is illegal to call yourself a Chiropractor unless you are registered with the GCC.

What Causes Back Pain?

Back pain is a very complex issue. Back pain often comes on for no apparent reason, performing a movement we have done thousands of times before e.g. doing up your shoe lace, bending to pick a pen off the floor or even just sneezing!

Obviously, these actions themselves do not cause the problem or pain would occur every time we performed that activity. Back pain is usually an accumulation of stresses over a long period of time rather than one specific event.



There are many factors that influence back pain. Many of these problems are down to our modern lifestyles, which involve **too much sitting, not enough exercise, high levels of stress and poor diets.**

Risk factors for developing back pain include:

- **Poor posture and muscle weakness/tightness**
- **Prolonged sitting**
- **Poor fitness levels**
- **Overuse- too much of one particular activity e.g. athletes and manual workers**
- **Being overweight**
- **Congenital problems e.g. scoliosis**
- **Accidents e.g. road traffic accidents**

Most Common Types of Injury

- **Facet joint sprain**

These joints are located between each vertebrae. Pain results from repetitive micro-trauma, overstretching and 'wear and tear'.

- **Muscle strain**

Sudden movements or overuse can cause microscopic tears in the muscle and causing them to tighten.

- **Sacroiliac (SI) joint sprain**

These two large joints are located either side of the base of the spine. They join the pelvis to the lower back. These joints transfer the weight between the upper and lower body. This is a common problem in pregnancy.

- **Disc injuries**

Discs are made of a jelly-like substance, which allows the spine to be flexible but strong. Injury causes the disc material to leak out, causing compression and irritation to the spinal nerves, resulting in associated leg symptoms.



What does Chiropractic treatment involve?

- **Manipulation or “Adjustments”**

Adjustments are skilled, quick, comfortable stretches to the involved joints. A “cracking” sound is sometimes heard. This technique increases movement in the stiff joints and reduces muscle spasm. This in turn reduces pain.

- **Soft Tissue Therapy**

e.g. massage, active release, trigger point therapy, stretching is used to loosen tightened and shortened muscles, thus reducing pain and increasing movement.



- **Medical Acupuncture**

Acupuncture needles are used to help relieve pain and reduce muscle spasm.

- **Rehabilitation Exercises**

Performing specific exercises to increase strength and flexibility is very important to minimise future problems.

- **Lifestyle Advice**

Your Chiropractor will give you advice on day to day activities to minimise future problems.

- **Orthotics**

Orthotics are heat moulded insoles, which are used to manage foot and ankle problems. They can also help with knee, hip and low back problems in many people.

Treatment Stages

Stage 1: Reduce joint inflammation and reduce pain

- Avoidance of aggravating factors
- Ice to reduce inflammation, muscle spasm and pain

Stage 2: Normalise joint movement and increase flexibility

- Specific chiropractic manipulation and mobilisation techniques, to increase movement, improve the function and reduce pain
- Deep soft tissue massage, trigger-point therapy and cross-friction are used to reduce muscle tightness.

Stage 3: Increase joint strength and stability, to help prevent recurrences

- When appropriate, exercises are introduced to improve strength, endurance and stability.
- Ongoing treatment is often recommended for long-term or recurring problems. This is usually on a 1-3 monthly basis.



Advice for Acute Back Pain

- **Use ice** - not heat.

Ice will help bring down the inflammation and swelling in the injured area. Do not use heat for the 1st 24-48 hours as this could make the problem worse. You can use an ice pack or a bag of frozen peas. Make sure you cover the ice pack in a tea towel or kitchen paper, to avoid burning the skin. Use the ice for 20-30 minutes, every 2 hours or as often as possible.

- **No hot baths**

Have a shower instead. Heat can make joint pain worse in the initial stages.

- **Keep mobile**

Do not stay in one position, e.g. sitting, driving, standing, too long as it will cause the back to stiffen further. Gently walking is recommended. If you cannot tolerate walking, try crawling on all fours until you loosen up.

- **Avoid prolonged bed rest**

Bed rest is not a recommended treatment. Staying in bed for more than 1-2 days has been shown to prolong the pain, increase stiffness and reduce muscle strength. This makes it harder to get going again and increases the likelihood of chronic or recurring pain.

- **Sitting posture**

Avoid sofas and deep chairs. Sit in higher chairs e.g. dining room chair. If the chair does not have a good low back support, place a small cushion or rolled up towel in the small of your back. This helps keep the natural arch in your spine.

- **Listen to your back**

Pain is a warning sign, don't ignore it. If what you are doing hurts – STOP. Don't try to push through the pain.

- **Rest as comfortably as you can**

Most people find lying with their knees bent, either on your side or back, most comfortable. This relieves pressure on the spine and helps the muscles relax.



- **Medication**

Ask your Chiropractor/Doctor/Pharmacist what the best medication would be to take.

- **Accept help**

Let your friends and family help you with day to day activities such as housework, DIY and gardening. If you push yourself to hard the injury will take longer to heal.

Back Pain Prevention

- **Keep active**

Regular exercise helps keep the back strong and flexible. Choose an activity you enjoy or you won't keep it up. Pick something that is right for you fittest level and increase the intensity gradually.

- **Choose the right mattress**

For most people a medium, pocket sprung mattress is best, as it spreads your weight more evenly. If the mattress is too hard it puts increased stress on shoulders and hips; too soft and it will sag it to middle. Many people also find memory foam mattresses very comfortable. It is also worth being aware the word "orthopaedic" means nothing when applied to beds.



- **Don't sleep on your stomach**

This increases the stress on your low back and neck joints.

- **Bend from the waist keeping your back straight**

Don't stoop and twist. This is the most common cause of back injuries even without lifting anything!

- **Don't sit for too long**

Prolonged sitting causes increase load on the spinal discs and weakens the muscles. Aim to get up and move about every 30-40 minutes.

Computer Advice

Most people spend a considerable amount of time using a computer, which can put our back under strain and can make us vulnerable to injury. Here is some advice to minimise the effects of using your computer.

- **Seat Position**

Hips should be slightly higher than your knees. Feet should be flat on the floor. Sit with your bottom at the back of the chair with your shoulder blades against the back rest.

- **Low Back Support**

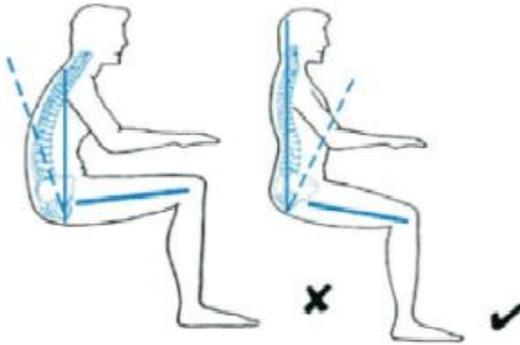
Choose a chair with a lumbar support or place a small cushion in the small of your back. This will arch the lower back slightly, to maintain its proper alignment and reduce pressure on the spine.

- **Eye level**

Your gaze should be aimed at the top of the screen. Adjust the height of the monitor using a stand or even book. Just make sure its stable.

- **Arm position**

Arms should be flat and your elbows level with the desk. Use a chair with arm rests.



Laptop Advice

Laptops are very convenient for working on the move but can make it tempting to work in awkward positions. To reduce the risk of injury, follow this advice.

- Invest in a laptop stand, to ensure the screen is at eye level.
- Buy a separate keyboard and mouse you can plug in when using your laptop at home.
- Use a rucksack design laptop case and carry it on both shoulders.

Driving Advice

- **Seat Height**

Knees should be level or slightly below your hips, this maintains the nature curve in your spine.

- **Seat Angle**

Your seat should be 10 degrees back from the upright position, to reduce pressure on the base of the spine.

- **Lumbar Support**

If your car does not have a lumbar support, place a small rolled up towel in the small of your back to keep the natural curve.

- **Steering Wheel Position**

Once you have adjusted your seat correctly, your hands should fall naturally on the steering wheel, with just a slight bend in the arms.

- **Take Regular Breaks**

Aim to stop 1-2 hours, get out of the car and move around for 5-10 minutes.

Sleeping Advice

- The ideal position for sleep is on your side with your knees bent with a pillow between them. This helps maintain spinal alignment, thus reducing stress on the spine.
- If you sleep on your back place a pillow under knees to reduce strain on your lower back.
- Do not sleep on your front as this puts excessive stress on the neck and low back, which can lead to recurring pain.



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