

LOW BACK PAIN GUIDELINES



HOW TO SAFELY RETURN TO YOUR REGULAR ACTIVITIES

General Recovery Time after a Low Back Injury

- Most people recover from a low back injury in 4-6 weeks (50% recover in ~2 weeks, 80% recover in ~6 weeks).
- Intense pains should resolve within a few days. Moderate to mild symptoms may persist for a few weeks.
- The severity of the injury, level of stress, fear of movement, and other factors will all impact recovery time.

General Pain and Exercise Guidelines

High Pain

Pain >7/10

- Gentle pain free movements
- Find positions of comfort to reduce pain
- Avoid lifting or strengthening movements when pain levels are high
- Consider ice or heat for pain management

Moderate Pain

Pain 4-6/10

- Focus on restoring normal range of motion
- Continue to focus on reducing pain through flexibility exercises
- Initiate strengthening exercises (light, 15-20 repetitions per set)
- Continue ice or heat for pain management as desired

Low Pain

Pain <3/10

- Progress to more strenuous activities at home and work
- Progress flexibility and mobility exercises to full spine range of motion
- Perform lifting, carrying, and strengthening movements as tolerated
- Focus on strengthening exercises that match daily activities

Symptom Guidelines

- If your symptoms travel into your hip or thigh regions, **stop and change** your activity. As a general rule, symptoms should not travel away from your spine.
- Exercises may cause soreness, but should make you feel better overall. *They should not cause more pain!*
- Temporarily avoid postures and positions that increase pain. Gradually get back to these positions over time.

Low Back Pain Information

The following pieces of advice should be considered after a low back injury

- Pain is rarely caused by a more serious medical issue (such as a fracture or cancer), that would require urgent medical attention. Weakness and pain in the legs, OR loss of bowel/bladder function warrants medical attention.
- If you are experiencing low back pain that is *not* improving within 6 weeks, you should see a medical provider.
- In most low back pain cases, X-rays and MRIs are *not* indicated as they often do not correlate with pain.
- >70% of back injuries are due to sprains and strains, which respond well to rest, easy exercise, and education.

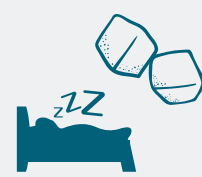


GENERAL RULE TO FOLLOW

If a movement increases pain or symptoms, **STOP** and modify that activity

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Low Back Pain Treatment Advice

The following pieces of advice should be considered when returning to normal activities.

- The use of ice or heat has not been determined by the research. The Pain Free Project recommends ice for the first 24-48 hours, then heat after 48 hours. However, individual preference is most important. Do what feels good!
- NSAIDs and over the counter medications can be helpful, but should *not* be taken without physician consent.
- Bed rest should be limited after a back injury. Gentle exercise and movement is indicated as soon as possible!



When is it Safe to Ride a Bike?

- Upright or stationary bikes are recommended early in the program. These are great for managing pain.
- When you can bend forward and backward without pain and mount/dismount a bike safely, then it is generally safe to progress to outside biking or a sport bike.
- Biking should be performed as tolerated. Review our 'Symptom Guidelines' above regarding when to stop.

When is it Safe to Return to Lifting Weights?

- No sensation of weakness or instability.
- Demonstrate ability to move your low back in all directions pain free.
- Demonstrate ability to fully raise your arms in all directions pain free.
- Full pain free participation in all **Pain Free Project** low back exercises.



Everyone responds differently to weight training. As a general rule, start with machine weights prior to free weights. These offer greater control.

Return to Lifting Weights Progression

For the entire low back pain activity guidelines, go to our Fix Your Low Back Pain Program!

Use Caution with These Weight Training Movements

Following a low back injury, be cautious with the following strength training movements

www.painfreeproject.com/teachable

GUIDED PAIN MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS IN YOUR POCKET



EXERCISE



SOFT TISSUE MASSAGE



EDUCATION



GENERAL RULE TO FOLLOW

If a movement increases pain or symptoms, **STOP** and modify that activity