Acute Back Pain

One-page summary of the full Spinemathema guide. Scan the QR code for the full guide, with references and audio.

Key points

- A sudden bout of low back pain is extremely common and, in most people, settles by itself.
- Taking suitable pain relief regularly, such as an anti-inflammatory if it is safe for you, lets you keep moving, and movement speeds recovery.
- Lying in bed for days tends to slow things down rather than help.
- Pain does not mean damage: your back may hurt, but gentle activity will not injure it.
- A small number of warning signs need urgent action: if you have numbness around your bottom or genitals, or new bladder or bowel changes, go to A&E or call 999 straight away.

Seek urgent medical help (A&E or 999) if you have:

- Numbness or tingling around your bottom, genitals or inner thighs (the "saddle" area).
- New difficulty passing urine, or loss of control of your bladder or bowels.
- Severe back pain with pain, numbness or weakness spreading into both legs.
- New loss of sexual sensation or function.

These can be signs of cauda equina syndrome, which is treated as an emergency. Do not wait to see if they settle.

Not sure how urgent it is? Call NHS 111. More warning signs: spinemathema.com/warning-signs

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General information only, not personal medical advice.
If you are worried about your symptoms, contact your GP, NHS 111, or in an emergency call 999.

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Scan for the full guide