



Back and neck pain: warning signs

Most back and neck pain is not serious and gets better. Keep this card somewhere handy so you know when to get help quickly.

Call 999 or go to A&E now if you have back pain, neck pain or sciatica with:

- Numbness or tingling around your bottom, genitals or inner thighs
- New difficulty passing urine, or not feeling when your bladder is full
- New leaking of urine, or loss of bowel control
- New loss of sexual sensation or function
- Pain, numbness or weakness in both legs, or leg weakness getting worse quickly
- Sudden severe weakness in your arms or legs, or suddenly being unable to walk

The first five can be signs of cauda equina syndrome. Do not wait for an appointment.

Get urgent help the same day (GP, NHS 111 or A&E) if you have:

- Neck pain with clumsy hands, unsteady walking or electric shock feelings
- Back or neck pain with a fever, or feeling very unwell
- New back or neck pain and a history of cancer (contact your cancer team)
- Back pain after a fall or injury, especially with thin bones or long-term steroids
- Weakness in an arm or leg that is new or getting worse

See your GP soon if you have back or neck pain with:

- Weight loss you cannot explain
- Pain that is constant, worse at night and not eased by rest or changing position
- Pain that is not improving after several weeks

What to say when you call:

"I have back pain and I am worried about cauda equina syndrome." Say if you have had cancer.

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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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