

## Help/ Advice Regarding Work:

If you are concerned about your ability to continue to undertake any aspect of your job or are worried that your work activities may be making your symptoms worse, please contact Occupational Health to explain the problem and both you and your Manager will then be advised regarding recuperative duties/ the need for any adjustments to your work activities etc.

### Please note:

It is important that you contact your General Practitioner if:-

- The pain fails to resolve with simple measures.
- The pain is transmitted to the buttocks/ hips/ legs etc.
- You develop any symptoms of numbness.
- You develop problems when passing urine.

## Sources of Help:

### North Campus

The University of Manchester  
Occupational Health  
The Mill  
PO Box 88  
Sackville Street  
Manchester  
M60 1QD  
Tel: 0161 306 4007  
Fax: 0161 306 3245

### South Campus

The University of Manchester  
Occupational Health  
Waterloo Place  
182-184 Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M13 9GP  
Tel: 0161 275 2858  
Fax: 0161 275 6989

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The University  
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# COPING WITH Lower Back Pain

Occupational Health  
Health and Safety Services  
The University of Manchester

## Introduction:

1. 60-80% of adults of working age suffer from back pain at some time
2. Back pain is the largest single reported cause of absence from work
3. Fifty million working days are lost each year at a cost of five billion pounds (or £200 for every employee) in sickness absence costs etc.

## Lower Back Pain

### What is it?

- This is pain/or an ache situated in the back somewhere between the bottom of the ribs and the bottom of the spine. The pain may also be felt to extend into one (or both) hips, buttocks and down the legs. It is not uncommon to also experience feelings of numbness and lack of sensation, pins and needles, or other physical symptoms.
- The symptoms may come on suddenly following an obvious strain but more commonly develop over some time with no obvious cause.

## Causes of Back Pain:

- Back pain may result from a single incident or accident when muscles or other supportive tissues attached to the spine are damaged. Pain can also result from gradual changes in the spine and supporting tissues which result from age and/ or disease.
- On occasions, the pain results from changes/ damage to the intervertebral discs which are cushions situated between the bones making up the spine (the vertebrae). If this disc bursts and presses on other nerves the symptoms (pain, pins and needles etc) will be experienced in the area of distribution of that nerve. When this occurs in the buttocks/hips/legs this is known as sciatica.
- It is important to note that not all back pain is caused by work. However, factors at work may indeed trigger it or make it worse.

## Treatment for Back Pain:

- There is now good scientific evidence that the best treatment for back pain is to stay active and continue with normal activities (which includes work!) despite the pain. In this case pain does not equate with harm. Being fit and active will help you get better faster and prevent a recurrence of the back pain in the future.

The following advice may be helpful:-

- Simple pain killers and anti-inflammatory drugs should prove helpful but if you have any concern contact your GP.
- Do not maintain a fixed position (standing or sitting) for too long. Change on a regular basis.
- Get up and walk about to avoid stiffening up.
- Take regular breaks when driving.
- Ensure you bend your knees and not your back for any activities.
- Anti-inflammatory drugs are not just simple pain killers. They help to speed up recovery.
- Walking and swimming are good forms of regular exercise for those suffering from back pain.
- If you do have to stay off work because of the pain try to avoid prolonged inactivity in bed (unless advised by your GP) as this can make the situation worse.
- If appropriate (in view of the nature of your work) at the appropriate time ensure that you attend a Manual Handling course organised by the University.