



YOUR BACK HEALTH

KEEP BACK PAIN  
AT BAY WITH GOOD  
SUPPORT

Your spine is made up of 24 bones (vertebrae). These are separated by discs of rubber-like tissue that act as shock-absorbers allowing your spine to flex and move. Your spine also supports and protects the spinal cord, the bundle of nerves that run down from the brain. The whole structure is held together by ligaments and tendons that connect the back muscles to the vertebrae.

This intricate and delicate structure is vulnerable to damage. Incorrect lifting, poor posture such as sitting badly or driving in a hunched position or even standing for too long are just a few of the triggers for back pain.

### BACK PAIN

Back pain is a common problem affecting 8 in 10 Australians.

Treatment depends on the cause, but can include appropriate exercise, medication and manual (physical) therapies such as massage. Staying active and continuing your daily activities as normally as you can plays an important role in long term back pain management. There's strong evidence that this helps with a faster recovery and can reduce your chances of chronic pain and disability.

### RED FLAGS

See your GP as soon as possible if you experience back pain and one of the following problems:

- A fever (high temperature)
- Redness or swelling on your back
- Pain down your legs and below your knees
- Numbness or weakness in one or both legs or around your buttocks
- Loss of bladder or bowel control (incontinence)
- Constant pain, particularly at night
- Pain that's worsening and spreading up your spine.

These symptoms are known as "red flags". It's important to seek medical help for these symptoms to ensure you don't have a more serious, underlying cause for your back pain.

## HELP TO PREVENT BACK PROBLEMS

Maintain good posture. Keep your shoulders back and don't slouch. This means that your ligaments can support your body and your muscles do not have to constantly contract to hold you upright.

Being active is an important part of preventing back pain. Regular exercise that boosts strength and endurance and exercises that help to keep the muscles supple are a back-healthy combination. Aim for 30 minutes of aerobic exercise at least five times a week and try to include two sessions of strengthening exercises that target key back muscle groups. Regular exercise can also help you maintain a healthy weight, reducing your risk of back pain.

Bend from your knees and hips, not your back. This is particularly important when lifting heavy objects or people. Bad work practices such as incorrect lifting practices can increase your risk of developing back pain, or exacerbate it.

Stretching can help reduce stress on your back. Breathe easily and relax as you stretch. Don't bounce as it may cause injury — instead, stretch a muscles slowly until you feel resistance but not pain. If you feel any pain, stop. Talk to your doctor or a sports health professional if you have any questions.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

Bupa health information  
[www.bupa.com.au/health](http://www.bupa.com.au/health)

Pain Australia  
[www.painaustralia.org.au](http://www.painaustralia.org.au)

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