

Low back pain recovery plan

For most people, the cause of their low back pain isn't clear, but evidence shows that serious causes are very rare.¹ This action plan outlines some of the treatments that can help you recover from low back pain that does not have a clear cause and has been present for a short time.

Simple treatments

Low back pain is unpleasant and can be distressing, but in most cases you will recover within 4–6 weeks just with simple treatments.^{2,5-7}

It's recommended that everyone with low back pain starts these simple treatments as soon as possible.²⁻⁴

Work with your healthcare professional to develop a recovery plan that suits your needs and situation.⁴

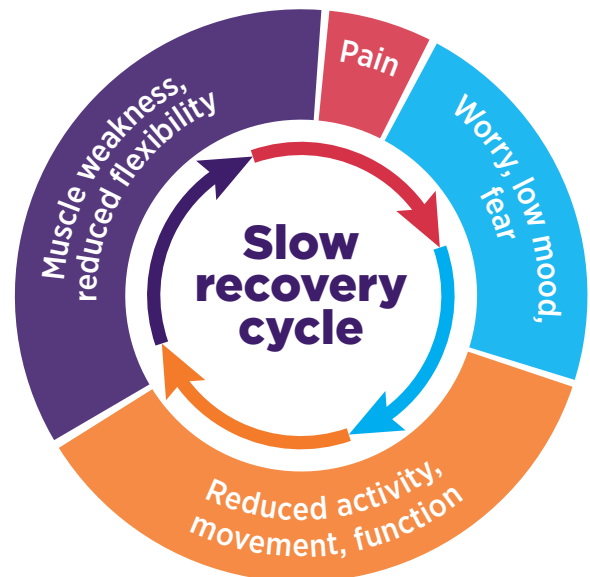
- Stay active as much as possible²⁻⁴ (see overleaf for details)
- Continue or quickly return to work and daily activities²⁻⁴
- Use heat packs to help with pain relief²

Slow recovery

Recovery can be slower than usual for a small number of people and lead to long-term low back pain.²

This can happen for many reasons.² One of the key reasons is how you feel and respond to pain.⁸

It's natural to feel worried, sad or fearful when you are in pain.³ However these thoughts and feelings can lead to a vicious cycle for some people,^{3,9} which affects how long it takes them to recover.⁸



Other treatments

If you have entered a slow recovery cycle, your healthcare professional can recommend one or more treatments in addition to the simple treatments above.²⁻⁴

Start these other treatments as early as possible to support your recovery.²⁻⁴

Medicines may also be recommended to help reduce your pain, but don't expect them to stop your pain completely.²

If medicines are needed, take them to help you stay as active as possible.²

- Exercise (eg, aerobic fitness, strengthening, stretching, whole body movements).^{2,4} After you recover, exercise can prevent future low back pain episodes.^{10,11}
- Manual therapies (eg, massage, mobilisation, manipulation).^{4,12}
- Psychological approach to treatment (eg, psychological therapies applied to physiotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy).^{2,3}
- Medicines:.....

Staying active

Staying active reduces your pain and speeds up your recovery.^{2,3} Avoid prolonged bed rest² and do your usual activities as much as possible.¹³

It's safe to be active. You might feel some pain, but this doesn't mean you're damaging your back.² It's important to set activity goals while pacing yourself so you don't overdo it.^{2,14-16}

Activity goals - what would you like to be able to do?

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How to reach an activity goal

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1. Pacing starts with finding your activity baseline. This is what you can do without significantly increasing your pain. It could be the distance you can walk. Now reduce that by a bit, so you don't overdo it.^{14,17}
2. Gradually increase your activity every day, by increasing the distance, speed or number of times you do the activity.^{14,17}

Day	Activity	Achieved	Comment

More information

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- ▶ NPS MedicineWise: www.nps.org.au/medical-info/clinical-topics/low-back-pain for information about scans, diagnosis and treatment
- ▶ Arthritis Australia www.mybackpain.org.au for information on low back pain and treatment
- ▶ Pain Health – Movement with pain <https://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au/pain-module/movement-with-pain> for advice and tips on how to move with pain
- ▶ Pain Health – Pacing and goal setting <https://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au/pain-module/pacing-and-goal-setting/> for advice and tips on activity goals and pacing

 References available online at: nps.org.au/lowbp-plan-refs