



Spinal Health

Neck and/or back pain after an injury is usually not harmful and often resolves within a few weeks. Other spinal pain can come on gradually because of muscle stiffness, poor posture, and/or stress - all of which can be treated effectively with advice and exercise from your physiotherapist.

There can be some fluctuation of pain within the usual recovery timeframe - good days and bad days - but your injury is unlikely to cause long term problems even if initially the pain was severe. Listening to your body on those days with more pain, and then adjusting your exercises/daily activities is key to helping your back gradually get used to movement again. Most people make an excellent recovery.

For most people with neck and/or back pain, your pain will improve within 4-6 weeks. To help this, it is best to:





- Stay active e.g. gentle walking; taking regular breaks from sitting/a single posture each hour
- Create a treatment plan with your physio to help your pain and activity levels improve, including follow up checks to ensure progress
- Remember pain does not mean damage

Bed rest is not the answer! Be proactive, stay positive, and get in touch to be assessed. Don't wait until lockdown is over – start your recovery now.

Even if you do not have pain, the same principles can be used to look after your spinal health long term: stay active; change your posture and move regularly; do a few back and neck exercises at least three times per week to support your spine's nature strength and mobility.

At CityMed Physio we are still open during the COVID-19 response. We provide the same high-quality assessment, diagnosis, advice and exercise-based treatment as usual, via video or phone consults. Contact info@citymed.co.nz or 093775525 option 2

Here are 4 exercises that are often prescribed to help start recovery from back pain for our patients:

1)	<p>THREAD THE NEEDLE</p>  <p>Description</p> <p>While on your hands and knees, assume a 'neutral' spine position (1). Slide your hand along the floor underneath your opposite shoulder to rotate through your thoracic spine (2). Hold for 2 secs then return to start and repeat to the other side. Repeat 10x each side, 3x daily.</p>	<p>FLEXION IN LYING</p>  <p>Description</p> <p>Lying on your back with your knees bent, flex your hips as far as you can. Grasp your knees and pull your legs to your chest. Hold for 30s. Repeat 3x daily.</p>
3)	<p>THORACIC FLEXION/EXTENSION</p>  <p>Description</p> <p>Kneel on your hands and knees on the floor. Try to extend your upper back by rotating your sternum upwards and forwards (1). Then try to flex your upper back by rotating your sternum towards your navel (2). Repeat. 3x10 sets daily.</p>	<p>EXTENSION IN LYING - STRENGTH</p>  <p>Description</p> <p>Lying on your front on the floor with your hands under your shoulders (1). Tighten your core. Using both your arms and your back muscles, lift the front of your shoulders slightly off the ground. Hold for 5 seconds. Lower and repeat 5 times, daily.</p>

Images thanks to therehablab.com

For neck exercises, please see our handout for neck pain.

Remember, posture is important for all neck/back pain – see our handout about ergonomics and posture at work: https://citymeddocs-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/physio_citymed_co_nz/EabrqKY3MXZIt_RnVIizwW4BPM0aQcUEhZefgp-CC9MZIg?e=loEhYs

Serious back injuries/conditions that require specialist referral are rare, but as physiotherapists we always assess for these in our consults.

- If pain spreads down your leg, particularly below your knee, get assessed by a physio (can be via telehealth) as this could be caused by a lumbar disc injury and require specific exercises to assist recovery
- If you are worried about your pain, and/or your pain is restricting your ability to work and/or do simple tasks like wash, cook and clean, get in touch to be assessed by a physio to start your recovery sooner rather than later



When to seek urgent medical care i.e. immediately call your doctor for a consult using telehealth during COVID-19 response (or go to the emergency department)

Call your GP reception and explain if you have any of the following problems. A doctor will see you the same day, and refer you to a specialist or for emergency care if you require it.

See a doctor urgently if you have:
Numbness in the groin or buttocks
Loss of bladder or bowel control
Redness or swelling on your back
Difficulty walking
Constant pain, especially at night
Pain that is getting much worse, or spreading up your spine
Numbness and/or pins and needles in both legs
Feeling unwell with your back pain, such as a fever or significant sweating that wakes you from sleep
Flu-like symptoms with a stiff painful neck and difficulty bending your head forward
Severe neck pain after an injury such as a motor vehicle accident, diving accident or fall
Lose function in your arm such as weakness, clumsiness and/or persistent loss of feeling
Have difficulty passing urine

Further Useful Resources

- <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/media/1001/knowning-about-your-low-back-pain-acc.pdf>
- http://www.bestpractice.net.nz/resources/ACC/ACC_lowBackPainManagement.pdf
- <https://lafisioterapia.net/en/10-facts-about-back-pain>
- <https://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/15-things-you-didnt-know-about-back-pain-2015.pdf>

References

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