

# *PHYSIO TIPS*

## *IN OCTOBER*

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### TIPS TO GET 'BACK' ON TRACK



Physio Tips is a monthly newsletter aimed at educating the public regarding the latest's evidence in injury management, without all the medical jargon. We will keep it simple and concise, but full of knowledge gems in order to empower and equip you.

### REACH OUT TO US

Last month we introduced the truths about back pain. This month we will provide you with some helpful tools to manage your back pain. People often “freak out” when their backs get injured, but this is not very helpful. Here is the up-to-date knowledge on lower back pain and advice on steps to take to help yourself.

Back pain is common and recurrent, but rarely serious.



### Tip 1: Don't panic - backs do get injured, and recover

All soft tissues can get injured or irritated - including your back. When we sprain our ankle, we know what to expect - possibly pain, a bit of swelling, maybe a limp - but we also know that it will heal. Our backs are no different. Our bodies have an amazing ability to heal, recover and adapt - this applies to all our structures. While some episodes of low back pain can be severe and frightening, most people recover reasonably quickly.

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### Tip 2: Don't rush for treatment - Help yourself

We often rush to seek help from healthcare professionals, especially when our pain is severe. However, it is not always necessary. Seeking help too early can often result in unnecessary costs (imaging/consultation). Try to apply ice or heat (often with a new back injury ice helps, and heat is more effective with recurring back pain) for relief. Go for a walk and perform gentle movements within acceptable levels of discomfort. Most of the time this is all you need.



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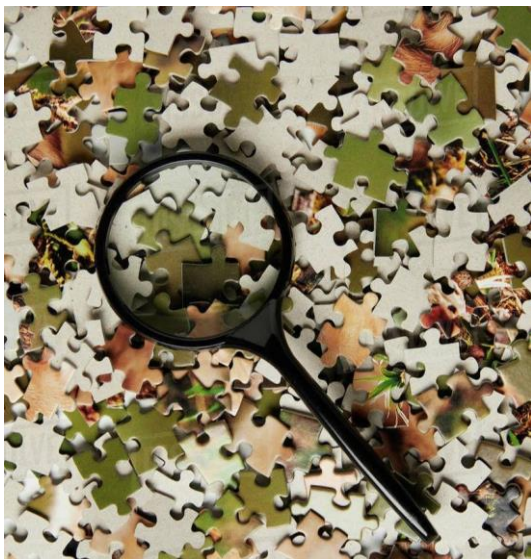
### Tip 3: Keep moving

Research has proven that bed rest has a negative effect on recovery and that people with low back pain that remain active (even when in pain) do better in the long term. Aerobic exercise also helps to calm down our nervous system. In addition, an increase in blood supply and oxygen assist our tissues to heal faster. It is normal for movement to feel difficult in the first few days (like a limp after an ankle sprain) and for certain movements to be more painful. Try to modify your activity and find the balance between letting the pain settle and still moving. Do not wait for the pain to disappear before you decide to get moving.

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## Tip 4: Return to normal activities

There is strong evidence that keeping active and returning to your usual activities and hobbies is important in aiding recovery. The activities we are often most fearful of are the ones involving impact, bending, lifting and twisting. Our backs are strong and can handle all movements, as long as it is gradually introduced to give our spine time to get accustomed to the task. Instead of stopping entirely, try to reduce the frequency of loading tasks, or change the way you do it. Do not wrap your back in cotton wool - our backs are designed for movement and will adapt to different loads with practice.

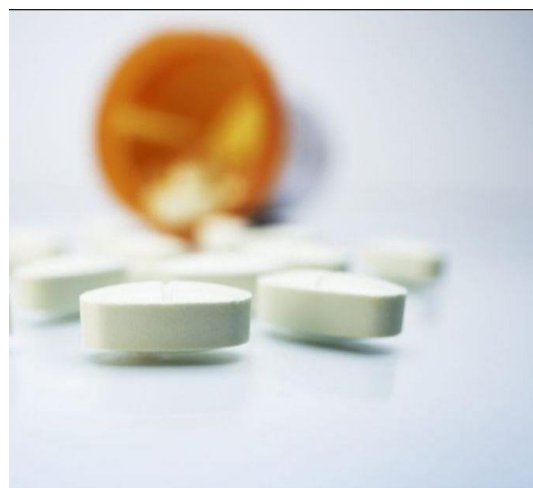


## Tip 5: Problem solve

Try to figure out what may have contributed to a flare-up of your pain. Write down the activities, emotional and stress situations of the previous day(s). Look out for unaccustomed activity and habitual behaviour patterns. Also be aware of non-physical factors that can trigger a pain experience - fatigue, lack of sleep, increased stress, depression, social struggles. The non-physical factors are the biggest contributors to chronic lower back pain. Understanding the factors involved and identifying what triggers your back pain, will give you the ability to make an informed decision about what to do next.

## Tip 6: Caution with medication and quick fixes

Pain medication can play an important role to reduce pain and therefore allows us to move more, which in turn will speed up recovery - but it should be approached sensibly. Often taking medication can distract us from engaging with approaches that would be more helpful. Some pain medications can also cause adverse side effects or dependency. If you feel like trying pain medication, first opt for simple over-the-counter options. Most importantly, pain medication shouldn't be used as standalone treatment nor as a long-term solution.





## Tip 7: Seek help when needed

The following are signs that might warrant seeing a medical professional:

- \* Symptoms that do not settle with the above mentioned strategies
- \* After a significant injury such as a car accident or a fall from a height
- \* Tingling sensations down the leg associated with numbness and/or weakness of the leg
- \* Changes in your bladder and bowel function and/or numbness around your sit bones
- \* Severe constant pain that worsens at night
- \* Unexplained weight loss in association with pain

## Tip 8: Return to work

When we are in pain the last thing we think we should do is go to work. As strange as it may sound, going back to work sooner can enhance the speed of your recovery. If you have a very heavy manual job, you will initially have to reduce the load at work. If you have a sedentary job, you might need to incorporate more active breaks than usual. Altering your work to suit your injury is far better than staying away entirely.



## Tip 9: Reduce your risk of recurring back pain

The following lifestyle strategies have been shown to reduce the risk of recurrent back pain

- \* Doing exercises that involve a variety of movements in the spine
- \* Doing cardiovascular exercise that you enjoy
- \* Gradual conditioning of the back to be able to handle loads, as opposed to avoiding loading
- \* Ensure you get enough sleep
- \* Maintain a healthy weight
- \* Reduce work and life stress by doing more fun and relaxing activities

If you are unsure about how to get moving or when to seek medical treatment, your physiotherapist will be happy to guide you.

# GET BACK IN ACTION

WATCH THIS SPACE FOR PHYSIO TIPS IN NOVEMBER:  
Diagnostic imaging: understanding MRI's, x-rays and ultrasound

READ MORE ABOUT US

## Where You Can Find Us



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HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?



*Interdisciplinary Health Professionals*  
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