

Low back pain & Stenosis

Your GP or Physiotherapist may have diagnosed you with 'low back pain and 'stenosis'. Stenosis essentially means 'narrowing' and is typical when you start to experience normal age-related changes in your lower back as you become older. This means the nerves can be irritated as they exit your spine and travel down your leg causing you leg pain or nerve symptoms like pins & needles or numbness.

Fortunately it can be managed well with the following advice and exercises. If however you struggling with your pain and experiencing worsening symptoms or any leg weakness then it is important to speak to you Physiotherapist or Doctor.

Please also see the [*Cauda Equina*](#) checklist on our website (found on the 'Back pain Self-help page') and act accordingly as described if you experience any of these symptoms.

What can I do to help?

If you are struggling with you pain, the following initial advice should help you get started:

Pain relief: Basic painkillers (like paracetamol) or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory gels (such as Ibuleve or Voltarol) are cheap and easily available over the counter without the need for prescription. These can be very effective as they lessen your discomfort and importantly allow you to keep you fully active. However, please check the labels for instructions/safe usage and any possible reasons why you should not use them. If you are currently taking any form of medication it is advisable to consult your GP or pharmacist before taking additional pain relief. Use the anti-inflammatory gel on your back rather than down the leg.

You GP may also advise you using a pain killer that is effective for nerve-related pain.

Heat or Ice: Heat is often useful for easing pain or spasms using a hot water bottle or wheat pack. Use for 15-20 minutes at a time and repeat several times a day as necessary. However, if you have had a recent flare-up you may find it more therapeutic to use an ice pack to reduce your pain/irritation. A packet of frozen peas wrapped in a tea-towel works well. Leave in place for up to 15 minutes at a time. Again, this can be repeated several times a day if found helpful.

Rest vs. activity: Remain active. On some days you may need to go easier but it is important to keep active otherwise you can simply become stiffer and sorer. If you experience a flare-up of your pain, you may need to adapt some of your activities at home or work but research shows us that continuing with your normal activities and staying at work sees people recovering quicker. It is important not to wait for the pain to go before deciding to get moving.

If you likely be troubled by pain from prolonged standing or walking: If so, ever so often find somewhere to perch/sit and either bend forwards a few times or simple lean forwards with your elbows on your knees. If you are out shopping, you may find it helpful to lean forwards on to your shopping trolley. This will give you some comfort that may enable you to tolerate some further standing/walking.

Exercises

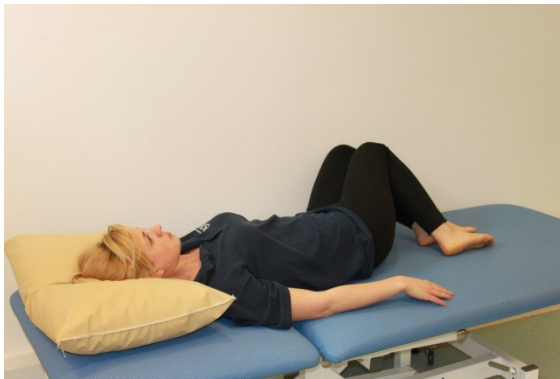
Perform these regular if possible. If possible; perform 1 or 2 of these 'flexion' exercises every few hours during the day to give maximum effect. Don't force any movements, particularly if they cause lasting pain. If any movements are troublesome, start gently and you will usually find you become more accustomed to the movements with little and regular practice.

Exercise 1 – Lying Knee Rolling

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet resting on your bed

Let your knees roll together from side to side to feel a stretch in your back. Just avoid any sharp/pinching pain. You may find one direction to more comfortable – ie. if you tend to have right leg symptoms then you may prefer to simple let your knee stretch towards the left side only .

Repeat 5-10 times

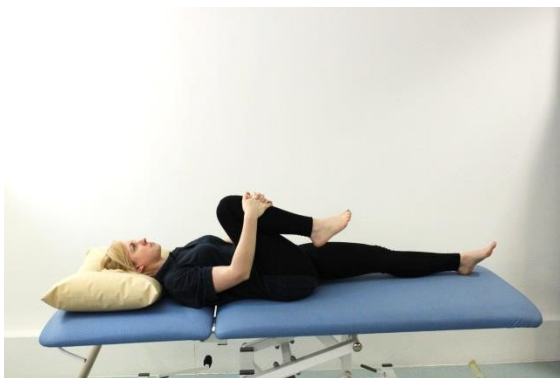


Exercise 2 – Lying Knee Hugs

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet resting on your bed

Hug one/both knee to your chest to feel a stretch in your lower back. Hold for 5 seconds

Repeat 5-10 times

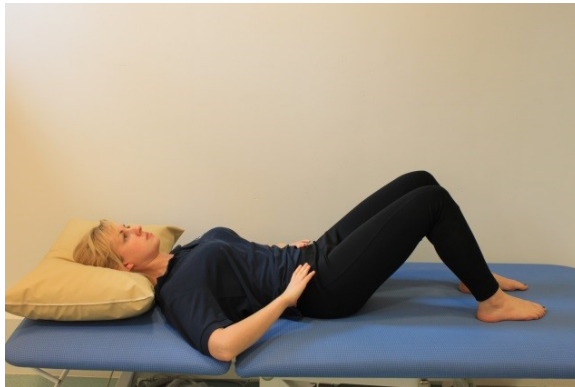


Exercise 3 – Pelvic Tilting

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet resting on your bed. Place your hands on your pelvis

Press your flat of your back firm against the bed, hold then relax back to the starting position

Repeat 5-10 times



Exercise 4 - Seated Lumbar Flexion

Sit on chair or edge of your bed. Place your hands on your knees

Slide your hands down your shins to your ankles then roll back again

Repeat 5 times regular



Exercise 5 - Strengthening

Lastly, strengthening exercises are really helpful. To get you started, try either/both:

- i) repeated double leg bridges with lying
- ii) repeated squats in standing

Perform until you achieve a short-lasting discomfort/fatigue feeling that lasts about 20-30 mins.

Increase the number of repetitions as a way of self-progressing as you improve and find these exercises easier to perform.

