



# Back Pain

If your back hurts, don't ignore the pain.

Physiotherapists have the training to correctly assess the problem and provide safe, effective treatment.

For rapid recovery, see your physiotherapist early.

## WHAT CAUSES BACK PAIN?

**POSTURAL STRESS:** Poor posture stresses your spine. Ligaments are over-stretched, muscles tire and joints and nerves are put under pressure. Think of the hours you spend sitting in a day and then wonder how well you sit?

**MUSCLE WEAKNESS:** Recent research has shown that weakness of the deep abdominal muscles can contribute to increased strain on the lower back. In the Gulf region, where we have a relatively sedentary lifestyle, we are more prone to deep abdominal weakness than in more active populations. Therefore, the evidence suggests we have greater likelihood of developing back pain.

**DISC PROBLEMS:** Discs are anchored to the vertebrae above and below, so they cannot 'slip' out of place. They can wear down with age, but most disc problems arise from injury, increased stress from posture or lack of muscular support. Discs can prolapse (bulge), herniate or even rupture.

**SCIATICA:** The Sciatic Nerves run from the lower back, through the buttocks and down the back of your legs. Irritation anywhere along this pathway will cause pain in the back, buttocks, legs or feet.

**MUSCLE STRAINS:** Minor back muscle strains quickly improve on their own, but more severe strains will need physiotherapy treatment to relieve pain and promote healing.

**LIGAMENT SPRAINS:** Stretching ligaments too far or too quickly makes them tear and bleed into surrounding tissues, causing swelling and pain. Motor vehicle and sporting accidents are common causes.

**ARTHRITIS:** Vertebral and facet joints can be affected by arthritis, causing degeneration and inflammation within the joint and the growth of bony spurs on the edges of the vertebrae.

## HOW YOUR BACK WORKS

Your back is a complex system of interlocking components:

- Vertebrae are the bones that make up the spinal column
- Discs separate the vertebrae and act as shock absorbers
- Facet joints between the vertebrae guide and control spinal movement
- Ligaments hold the vertebrae together
- Muscles are attached to the bones. They control and produce movement



## TIPS TO HELP YOU MOVE WELL & STAY WELL

Here is some useful advice to help you prevent back pain:

**LIFTING:** With your feet shoulder-width apart, bend at your knees and then hips. Grip the load firmly and hold it close to your body, tighten your stomach muscles and use the strong muscles in your legs to push up. Keep your back as straight as possible, and gently breathe out. Avoid twisting – turn by using your feet, not your back.

**STANDING POSTURE:** Think tall: chest lifted, shoulders relaxed and slightly back, chin tucked in and head level. Posture should be stable, balanced and relaxed when sitting, standing or walking.

**SITTING:** Don't stay seated in one position for too long – no longer than 20 mins. Stand up, adjust, stretch or walk around. The right back support will also help. Also ensure that your workstation and computer are correctly positioned.

**EXERCISE:** Stay in shape – healthy body-weight is less strain on your back. Your physiotherapist can show you how to keep your back flexible and strong with correct back and abdominal exercises.

**DRIVING:** Good support from your car seat will prevent back pain. If you need more lower back support, use a lumbar roll or a rolled up towel. People with back pain should try to avoid extended periods in any car, especially low cars.

**SLEEPING:** Your mattress should be firm enough to support your natural shape. Your pillow should maintain your neck in a straight line – usually one supportive pillow is sufficient.

## HEALTH REBATES

You may consult a physiotherapist either directly or by referral from your medical practitioner. Most private health insurance funds offer rebates for physiotherapy treatment.

## HOW PHYSIOTHERAPY CAN HELP

In many countries, doctors refer patients with back pain to physiotherapists in preference to other health practitioners. Depending upon the cause and type of pain, physiotherapists treat back pain in a variety of ways:

- Advice and early activity (recent research indicates that one of the most important treatments for low back pain is movement)
- Mobilisation/manipulative physiotherapy
- Mulligan therapy
- Biomechanical analysis and reeducation
- McKenzie therapy
- Specific stabilisation exercises
- General exercises and stretches
- Ergonomic, postural and exercise advice

Musculoskeletal physiotherapists have training in the management of musculoskeletal disorders and have more ways to help your back move well and stay well. Research has proven that specific stabilisation exercises are an effective treatment for low back pain.

Physiotherapists are the only group of professionals appropriately qualified and educated to instruct in these exercises. Your physiotherapist can also advise on other similar exercises (yoga, pilates) and general appropriate activities.

Ongoing 'maintenance treatments' should not be required once your back has been successfully treated by your physiotherapist and you are self managing with a specific exercise program. If severe pain persists, other causes will need to be investigated. Your physiotherapist can recommend and refer you to a specialist as needed.

## GENERAL

Physiotherapists in Dubai must all be registered with either Dubai Healthcare City or Department of Health and Medical Services. To gain registration, they will have needed to prove their qualifications and have an exemplary record. Ask to see certification of this registration if you require it. They are bound by a professional Code of Ethics and have access to extensive and continuing postgraduate education programmes.