

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

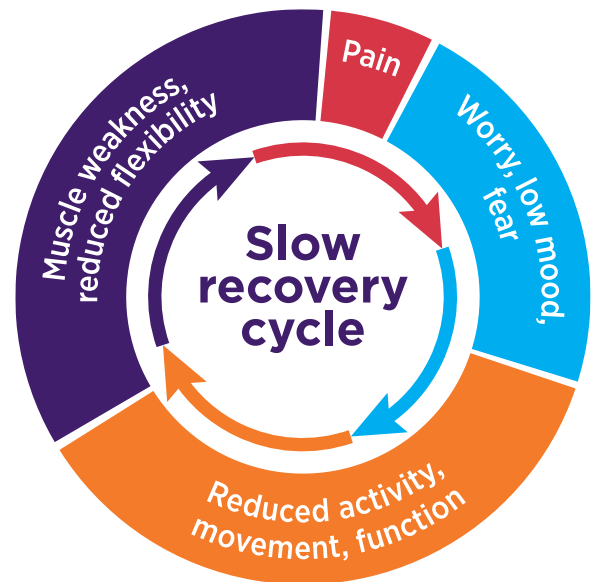
- Stay active as much as possible^{2–4} (see overleaf for details)
- Continue or quickly return to work and daily activities^{2–4}
- Use heat packs to help with pain relief²

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?

How to reach an activity goal

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

- ▶ 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: www.nps.org.au/lowbp-plan-refs