

# Self-Care Instructions

The (sort of) bad news: you have back pain.

The good news: you're not alone; 4 out of 5 people will have an episode of back pain at some time.

The *best* news: This episode of pain is very manageable by YOU.

The fact that your health care provider is giving you this sheet is a great sign! It means there is no indication that you need x-rays or MRIs or to see a specialist, and there is no sign of a serious underlying condition. You have what we often call “mechanical back pain”, and as we mentioned, YOU should be able to manage this condition very effectively. You'll just need to follow some fairly simple advice. Our recommendations are all supported by the latest research.

## STAY ACTIVE

Staying active, even initially after the onset of your back pain, is very important for quick recovery. As we mentioned, your health care provider has found no sign of serious underlying disease, so the best thing you can do is engage in your usual daily activities, unless any particular activity causes severe pain – then avoid only that activity for now. If an activity causes temporary mild or moderate pain, you are not doing damage to your spine by remaining active – and you are aiding in recovery.

Here are some useful self-care tips:

## LIMIT BENDING FORWARD FIRST THING IN THE MORNING

The discs of your spine (the shock absorbers between the bones) absorb fluid at night, so they naturally tend to be a bit swollen first thing in the morning. For this reason we want you to bend forward as little as possible first thing in the morning.

## USE ICE AND/OR HEAT FOR SORENESS AND STIFFNESS

There is no strict rule about ice or heat when it comes to back pain. Try one or the other (or alternate them) and see what works for you. You can use an ice pack or package of frozen vegetables, or a heat pack that can be found in most pharmacies. Be sure to place a thin layer of cloth between the pack and your skin. Apply at 15 minutes on/ 30 minutes off intervals, repeating as necessary.

## USE OVER-THE-COUNTER PAIN MEDICATION AS NEEDED

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (aka NSAIDs) are over-the-counter pain relievers that can be quite beneficial for short term use. Take only as directed on the bottle (or by your health care provider), avoid use if you have stomach or intestinal issues like reflux, and only take them for a short time - perhaps for 2 weeks after onset of your pain, or until the pain resolves, whichever is sooner. If you still feel the need to use these medications after 2 weeks, you should seek additional care (see below).