

# Acute Lower Back Injury Advice (for lumbar strains & sprains)

## For the acute phase (first 3 days):

**Protect:** The area from any stress or activity (lifting, sports, bending, twisting, wrenching movements, unnecessary weight bearing) which may cause further injury or affect the healing process. Move carefully, keeping your abdominals engaged to support your back, and bend at the hips/knees (not lower back).

**Rest:** In the initial, acute stage of injury you should rest the back to optimise healing and keep your energy reserves for this process. Lying on a firm mattress or a padded floor works well. A pillow under your knees and/or a rolled-up towel under your lower back may make you more comfortable. If sitting ensure you don't slouch and keep a natural forward curve in your lower back (a cushion, back support or rolled up towel helps support your lumbar curve).



### ***Neutral Spine 'resting' Position:***

Take regular 20-minute rests throughout the day to allow your back to repair/calm! Use the neutral position (left) and lie on a duvet, Pilates/camping mat, or sun lounger cushion.

**Ice:** Ice the area for 20 minutes 2-6 times a day, depending on severity. Use an ice pack or frozen peas wrapped in a tea towel (or a GENTLE 5-minute ice massage, with a paper cup of ice).

**Gentle movement** of the area is beneficial, but only small movements, and within a relatively pain-free range of movement.

**Avoid** anti-inflammatory medicines (ibuprofen, naproxen, diclofenac [Volterol], aspirin) in the acute phase as they interfere with the healing process. Use regular analgesics (e.g. paracetamol or CoCodamol, or a GP can prescribe stronger analgesics/muscle relaxants) and icing to control pain. Also avoid treatment/exercise in the acute phase (though Acupuncture and Ultrasound Therapy can be beneficial). Avoid hot baths and heat packs!

## For the early subacute phase (day 4-7):

**Move:** After resting for 72 hours, it is very important to get the injured area moving (slowly/carefully). This helps with tissue healing, helps restore range of movement and ensures functional scar tissue formation. Move the area regularly throughout the day (exercises shown). Listen to your body and don't move into painful positions.

**Ice:** You can ice the area 1-2 times per day, but only if you feel it's necessary (i.e. to reduce pain/inflammation). At the end of the day, or after work/activity which may have aggravated it, is usually indicated.

**Load:** Begin normal day to day activities/work using the area, keep it moving but don't strain/wrench it. The first week is usually too soon to return to sports or heavy physical work (i.e. bending and lifting).

**Exercise & Stretch:** Depending on the injury severity, light rehabilitation (Pilates/strengthening) exercises are now beneficial in back injury healing. Strengthen the lower back muscles, glutes and core muscles for lower back pain. Expect some discomfort during/after exercise, but avoid anything which causes sharper pain.

**Rest:** Make sure you take time to rest the area during the day, and in the evening. You may need to cut down your work hours, and avoid/limit aggravating activities.

**Avoid** regular anti-inflammatory medication. Its fine if you need anti-inflammatories (or Curcumin from Tumeric) to get you through work, or other aggravating activities; ensure you take a break in the evening though for essential healing processes to occur. Anti-inflammatories (with food) and regular analgesics can be alternated for moderate-severe pain/sciatica.



### ***Knee Rocking:***

1. Lie on your back on a mat. Carefully pull your knees to your chest, allowing your ankles to cross for comfort, till your buttocks start to lift off the floor.
2. Gently rock your knees to your chest & back, finding a 'natural, rebounding' rhythm. Continue for 10-20 seconds, 3 x day.



### ***Lower Back Stretch:***

1. Lie on your back, arms apart. Hold the outside of your thigh (knee & hip bent).
2. Slowly pull your leg across your body to stretch. Keep your hip on the ground to target glutes, let it rise to target lower back/lumbar (shown). Repeat 3 x day



### ***Cat Stretch:***

1. Get on your hands and knees (hands under shoulders & knees under hips).
2. Take a breath in; as you breathe out slowly push your mid-lower back up to the ceiling (tilting head to groin). Breathe normally and hold stretch for 10 seconds.
3. Take another breath in, as you breathe out push your abdomen/chest to the ground (curving spine to ground), raising your head to look forward. Breathe normally and hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 5-10 times per day.



### ***Knee rolling:***

1. Lie on your back, knees bent and feet flat on floor (as shown).
2. Pull in your abdomen (engage core) and let your knees roll (controlled) to the side until you feel your back move/work adequately.
3. Slowly roll the other way. Repeat 10-20 x (3 x day). As you improve, let your knees go all the way to the floor!