

Physiotherapy Department

The advanced back rehabilitation programme

This booklet explains what happens during the advanced back rehabilitation programme and how the exercises may help your condition. We have also included instructions for the exercises towards the end of this booklet to help you when you are practising at home.

If you have any further questions about the programme or exercises, please ask the physiotherapist during the class.

What should I expect from the programme?

The classes will take place once a week for six to eight weeks. During each class you will do an hour of circuit-based exercises, which have been chosen to improve the movement and coordination of the trunk, lower back and pelvic regions.

The classes are supervised by physiotherapists who will check that you are doing the exercises correctly and safely. If you feel that your pain is worsening when doing the exercise class, please tell the physiotherapist.

Why have I been referred?

Nearly all research agrees that exercise is the best treatment for people with low back pain. Evidence shows that exercise can reduce pain and improve overall function. Other kinds of treatment can be helpful in the short-term, but doing exercises seems to make the biggest difference in the long-term. These particular exercises are designed for people who may want to return to sport or higher level activities.

How does exercise help?

Exercise can help to:

- improve flexibility, strength, endurance and fitness, all of which help in the prevention **and** treatment of back pain
- improve mood and mental well-being
- reduce the risk of other health problems, such as heart problems, diabetes or obesity.

People often feel nervous about moving and exercising when they have pain. However, it has been shown that exercise can build confidence to move and exercise more freely, therefore helping you to return to your daily activities.

Should I do exercises outside of the class?

To get the best results from this programme, you should do exercises at home on a regular basis as well. If your physiotherapist gave you some exercises to carry out before the class, continue with these. We also suggest that you add at least one of the exercises you were taught during the class. Try to create a manageable daily routine to follow.

Can I do other exercises?

Yes. It has been suggested that doing cardiovascular exercises (such as walking or gentle swimming) for around 20 minutes three to five times a week can improve both aerobic fitness and low back pain.

It is advisable to pace your return to normal sporting activity. For example, if you have not been exercising (swimming, running or going to the gym) since your back pain started, you will need to restart at a lower level than you were used to before. You can then slowly and safely increase this amount. This is true for all sports. If you would like more information on this, please speak with your physiotherapist.

What should I do once the programme is finished?

Some people do not see big improvements straight away. Generally muscle takes longer than just six weeks to start strengthening – it can take a few months before you get the most favourable result. Therefore, it is important to **stay motivated and carry on with the exercises** even when the programme is finished.

It is just as important to continue exercising even if your pain settles during the programme. There is evidence that regular exercise may reduce the risk of your pain coming back.

What happens if my pain comes back?

By following the advice and exercises given to you in the classes, you will be reducing the risk of future flare-ups. Unfortunately, there are no treatments that can guarantee that your pain will not return. If you do experience a flare-up of your pain, what you do in the early stages is very important.

1. **Don't panic** – Stress has been shown to increase pain. Remember that serious damage is **very** rare and often pain may flare up and then settle down again quickly.
2. **Control your pain** – There are a number of treatments you might find helpful. The most effective can often be painkillers. Don't hesitate to take them if you need them. Talk with your GP/pharmacist about the best medicine for you. Other things that may help are heat and cold packs to reduce pain and relax your muscles.
3. **Exercise and stay active** – It is best to continue with gentle exercises and to keep going to work. Even though some things that you do may be painful, moving gently will not damage your back.

Hopefully by completing the exercise programme, we have given you the best tools to help manage these flare-ups yourself.

When should I contact my doctor?

Although back pain can be severe and worrying, it is rarely a sign of serious illness. However, if your symptoms change dramatically, or if you feel unwell with your back pain, you should see your GP.

Useful websites

w: www.backpain.org

w: www.arc.org.uk

The exercises

Over the next few pages, you can find details of the exercises that you do during the advanced back rehabilitation classes. Remember, it is important that you are doing some of these at home to get the best out of the programme.

All of the exercises have detailed descriptions next to them to help you. However, if you are unsure how to do an exercise, ask the physiotherapist to check your technique during the class session.

Feedback

We very much hope you enjoy and find this course useful. If you feel that there are things we could improve on, we will always welcome your feedback and comments. Please discuss them with your physiotherapist.

1. Front sling



- Stand with your back to the pulley machine.
- Adjust the weight as required.
- Hold the handle overhead with one hand and pull down.
- At the same time raise the opposite knee.
- Maintain your balance and position of your back.

2. Back sling



- Stand facing the pulley machine.
- Adjust the weight as required.
- Hold the handle overhead with one hand and pull down.
- At the same time pull the opposite leg back.
- Maintain your balance and posture.

3. Single leg row



- Stand on one leg holding onto the resistance band.
- Bend your elbows and pull the band towards you.
- Maintain an upright position and avoid leaning backwards.

4. Trunk rotation



- In standing, hold onto the resistance band with two hands.
- Keeping your lower body still, twist to one side and pull the band.
- Return to neutral.

5. Foam roller balance



- Lie down on a foam roller.
- Start with your arms overhead as shown, and slowly circle them back out, around and in.
- As you do this, raise one leg and straighten the knee. Lower slowly and continue with the other leg.

6. Press-ups



- Start on your hands and knees, as shown in the photo, with your weight on your arms.
- Bend your arms to do a press-up.
- Keep your head in line with your body.
- **To progress:** start with your hands and toes on the floor, and your back neutral, and repeat as above.

7. Side plank



- Lie on one side and support yourself on your elbow and knees.
- Gently raise your hips towards the ceiling, keeping your body in a straight line.
- **To progress:** repeat as above with your legs straight and only your feet and elbow on floor.

8. Side strength



- Stand with your side to the wall.
- Bend the inside knee and balance on the outside leg.
- Place a ball between the inside knee and the wall.
- Bend and straighten the supporting (outside) leg.
- Maintain your neutral spine posture and balance.

9. Bridging



- Lie on the floor with your heels on the gym ball.
- Raise your hips towards the ceiling and hold as long as you can.
- Lower slowly.
- Place your arms on the floor if you need support.
- **To progress:** raise one leg off the ball and maintain a neutral position at your pelvis and back.

10. Forward bends



- Put the resistance band under your feet and cross it in front of your body.
- Slowly roll forwards into a curved position, starting with your shoulders.
- Pull on the band as you return to an upright standing position.

11. Superman



- Start on all fours.
- Stretch one arm and the opposite leg out.
- Keep your pelvis and back still.
- Don't overstretch your hand and leg.

12. Forward ball roll-out



- Lean over the top of the ball and reach your hands towards the floor.
- Walk your hands forwards until the ball is under your hips or thighs.
- Try to maintain a neutral spine position using your abdominal muscles.
- Walk your hands backwards to return to the starting position.
- **To progress:** when you have walked the ball forwards, try to raise one arm off the floor.

13. Lunges



- Stand with your feet together.
- Step forwards on one leg, bending both knees as far as comfortable.
- **To progress:** hold weights or step onto a foam pad.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about the advanced back rehabilitation class, please contact the physiotherapy department on **020 3049 4004 (8.30am – 5pm, Monday to Friday)**.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

e: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Leaflet number: 3950/VER1

Date published: June 2014

Review date: June 2017

© 2014 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust