

Kijabe OPD Guidelines Low Back Pain

Key Facts:

- Low back pain is an extremely common presentation. 60 - 80% report back pain at some point in their lives.¹
- Most (85 - 90 %) is benign and self - limiting but it's important to recognize which is not by looking for red flags. These may suggest *spinal fracture, cancer, infection* or serious pathology associated with *prolapsed intervertebral disc*

Red Flag History:

- Trauma
- History of Pulmonary / Extra - pulmonary TB
- History of:
 - Cancer
 - Osteoporosis
 - HIV
 - Immunosuppression/steroids
- Constitutional symptoms – fever, chills, weight loss
- Age <20 or >50
- Recent bacterial infection.
- Pain that is:
 - Worse when supine
 - Severe at night
 - Constant and progressive or no improvement after 2 - 4 weeks Rx
 - Stops patients walking or self-care
 - Accompanied by severe morning stiffness
 - Associated saddle anesthesia or change in bladder/bowels

Red Flag Examination:

- Structural deformity
- Severe or progressive neurological deficit in the lower extremities.
- Unexpected laxity of anal sphincter
- Perianal/perineal sensory loss
- Major motor weakness: Knee extension, ankles plantar eversion, foot dorsiflexion.
- Bony point tenderness

PATIENT EDUCATION ON DANGER SIGNS!

Management

- *Symptoms < 1 month with no red flags.*
Simple analgesia and advise physio exercises (see below)
- *Symptoms > 1 month with no red flags.*
Check ESR and Lumbar Spine X-ray. If normal simple analgesia and refer to physio.
If ESR or X-ray abnormal discuss with consultant.
- *Symptoms any duration with red flags.*
Discuss with consultant re further management.

NB: NSAIDs with PPI cover, if unable to take NSAIDs, give PCM but less evidence, avoid opiates.
if neuropathic pain amitriptyline 2.5mg NOCTE **or** Pregabalin 150mg BD (*titrate dose upwards slowly*)

Consultant review if any of the following:

- Any patient with red flags
- Pain lasting > 1 month with abnormal x - ray or ESR
- Any patient felt to require orthopaedic review.

Back pain

The following exercises should be started gently and increased gradually, and you should not try to push hard to get rid of pain. A little discomfort is common when starting a new activity or exercise, especially if you have not been active for some time, as your joints and muscles get used to working again. Try each exercise in turn and find out how many times you can repeat it without feeling extra discomfort the following day. If you are not sure, try each one 5–10 times to start with. As your back gets used to the new exercise, you should gradually increase the number of times you do the exercise. If you are lucky, you may find a particular exercise eases your pain. If so, you should do more of this exercise and can use it as 'first aid'.

Sometimes you may experience a 'flare-up' or marked increase in pain. This can happen whether you exercise or not. For a couple of days you may be happier reducing the amount you exercise, but try not to stop completely. As the pain eases, try and build back up to the previous level quite quickly.

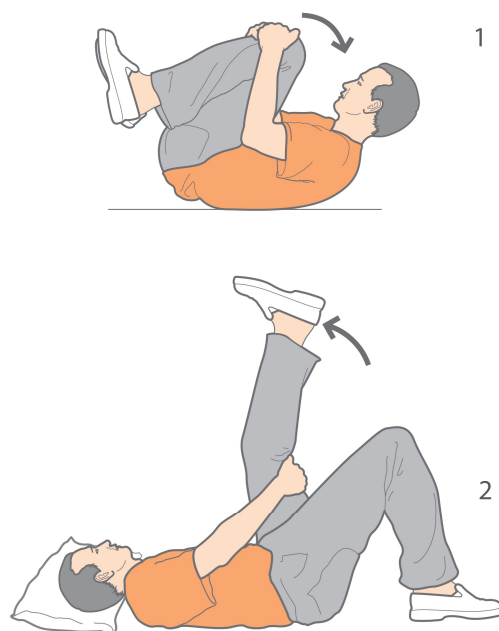
Exercises

1. Hugging knees to chest

Lying on your back with bent knees, lift one leg and hold on to it with one hand and then lift and hold the other leg. Pull both knees gently closer to your chest, hold for a count of 5, then relax your arms but don't let go completely. Repeat the hug and relax. Some people prefer to hug one knee at a time.

2. Leg stretches

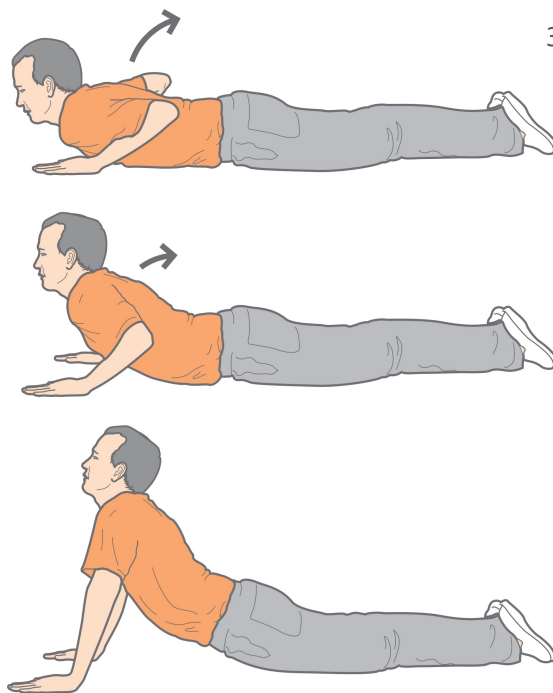
Lying on your back with your knees bent, lift one knee and hold your thigh with both hands behind the knee. Gently straighten the knee that you are holding and hold for a count of 5. Repeat with the opposite leg.



(continued overleaf)

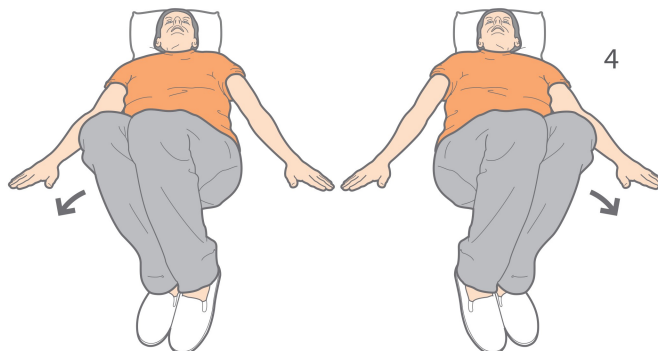
3. Half push-ups

Lie on your front on a firm surface, with your hands under your shoulders, palms down. Look up and push up, lifting your head and shoulders up with your arms. Keep your hips on the floor. Hold for a count of 5 and then gently lower yourself back down. To start with, you may not be able to lift your shoulders far. As you become more flexible, work towards trying to straighten your arms, still keeping your hips on the floor.



4. Knee rolls

Lying on your back with bent knees, let your knees roll to one side, keeping your knees and feet together. Stay to one side for a count of 5 and then roll to the other side.



5. Arching and hollowing

Start on all fours, hands under shoulders, knees under hips. Arch your back upwards, letting your head drop, and hold for a count of 5. Then reverse this posture: lifting your head and looking up, relax your tummy and stick your behind out, holding for a count of 5.

