



**8 WAYS TO FIX
UPPER BACK
PAIN AND STIFFNESS**

WHAT IS BACK PAIN?



A healthy spine will have mobile joints, wide and hydrated discs, and nice wide spaces between the vertebrae where the nerves pass out of the spine.

The discs of the spine consist of a soft fluid centre surrounded by many fibrous rings holding the fluid in place. If the fibrous rings are damaged, the fluid centre can push through and sometimes burst out of the disc causing local inflammation and sometimes nerve irritation. The discs can also degenerate and become narrower. This means that the vertebrae become compressed closer together causing stiffness in the joints of the spine and can also lead to squeezing the nerves of the lower spine. Pain from disc damage can therefore be local in the back and also down the leg.

FIXING BACK PAIN

One of the most common complaints that people coming into the clinic have is of ongoing upper back pain. Often the back pain has been nagging for a long time and then there is a flare up of acute spasm. The good news is that these problems can always be helped and symptoms can be settled long-term.

There are lots of people out there with this complaint, many of whom assume they just have a 'bad back' that they have to live with. Some who seek help from their GP will be prescribed rest and painkillers, but most of the time this will not solve the problem.

The key to resolving this type of back issue is assessing exactly what structures are at fault, where the nerve is getting trapped and fixing these specific issues to allow the spine to relax and the nerve to function normally.

Here, you'll find our top 8 tips on supporting your back, reducing stress on it and keeping the sciatic nerve strong and healthy.

TIP NUMBER 1

DON'T LOOK DOWN

Good posture with your smartphone, tablet and laptop



Good posture with your smartphone, tablet and laptop

A common modern day problem - people hunched over their phones! These postural issues used to be the sole domain of the office worker but we are seeing more upper back issues in everyone now due to poor posture on phones, tablets and laptops. Sitting with rounded shoulders and head looking down for long periods puts excessive strain through the upper spine and the muscles around the neck and shoulders. Sitting in a proper chair and having the screen at eye level will help to keep your upper back more relaxed.

PHONE

Don't look down

TABLET

Stand it up

LAPTOP

Raise it up. Use a wireless keyboard if necessary

TIP NUMBER 2

WHERE TO SIT

Sit in a chair with back support



Sit in a chair with back support

Whether you work in an office, commute in your car, or watch TV in a chair in the evening, it's key to have proper back support.

Having your back in contact with the back of a chair has been shown to maintain a good curvature of the lower back therefore reducing the stress on it whilst sitting.

Ensuring that the arms of the chair fit under the desk will allow you to sit back against the back support of the chair whilst working.

SIT PRETTY

CAR

Take the time to adjust your car seat

WORK

Sit in a supportive office chair

HOME

Don't slouch on the couch in the evening

TIP NUMBER 3

HOW TO HOLD

Hold objects close to your body when carrying



Hold objects close to your body when carrying

When carrying an object for a prolonged time, hold it close to your body and, if possible, rest it on your hip to reduce the amount of work your upper back muscles

have to do. When picking things up or putting them down, keep them close to your body for as long as possible to avoid upper back strains.

Using two hands to carry objects will reduce the likelihood of strains, as will keeping the spine upright and straight throughout the lifting and carrying process.

HOLD ON

KIDS

Get close when lifting them up

WORK

Avoid lifting above the shoulders

HOME

Use two hands and keep elbows tucked in carrying boxes

TIP NUMBER 4

BAGS

Don't carry heavy bags on one shoulder



Don't carry heavy bags on one shoulder

If you have to carry heavy bags with you a lot of the time, then it would be worth investing in a bag that you can carrying over both shoulders. This will distribute the weight through the back more evenly but is still likely to cause back pain if done too much.

Carrying bags on the same shoulder all of the time can lead to a curve in the spine in the long-term due to that shoulder being under extra compression.

HOLD IT

SHOPPING

Use a wheelie bag for groceries

WORK

Use a bag with two straps

SCHOOL

Only carry books that you need that day

TIP NUMBER 5

ALTERNATE SIDES

Switch sides when carrying children



Switch sides when carrying children

If you are regularly carrying a baby or a small child, try to alternate the side you are carrying them on so that one side of your body doesn't become overloaded with the extra weight. The temptation is to have your dominant hand free to use whilst holding the child in your other hand but this will eventually cause problems due to the imbalance in the muscles being used in the upper back.

If you are carrying a baby for longer periods of time, use a baby carrier with two straps.

KIDS

BABY FEEDS

Alternate the hand or arm you use to feed your baby

SLINGS

Alternate weight bearing shoulders

CARRIERS

Distribute weight evenly

TIP NUMBER 6

WARM IT UP

Use heat to soothe achey muscles



Use heat to soothe achey muscles

If your upper back feels achey and tired, try putting a hot water bottle on the sore area for 10-15 minutes. This will bring blood flow to the area and relax tight muscles .

A hot water bottle or warm bath is perfect for this as the moist heat will get to the deep tissues.

You can repeat this several times per day but leave at least 2 hours between applications to avoid overheating the skin.

HEAT & ICE

HOT PACK

To arm specific area

WARM BATH

To relax the entire body

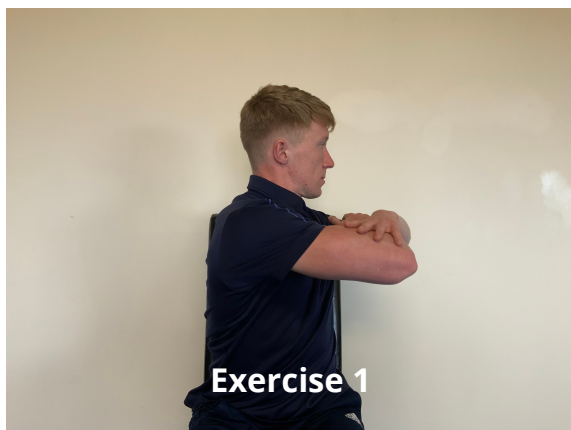
ICE

If area is hot and swollen, peas in a tea towel does the job

TIP NUMBER 7

STRETCH

Try these two simple exercises every morning



Try these two simple exercises every morning:

Exercise 1

Sit upright with your arms folded across your chest. Lengthen through the spine by extending upwards through your head and neck. Keeping your hips flat on the seat, Slowly turn your body as far as you can to the left and then as far as you can to the right. Repeat this 10 times each direction.

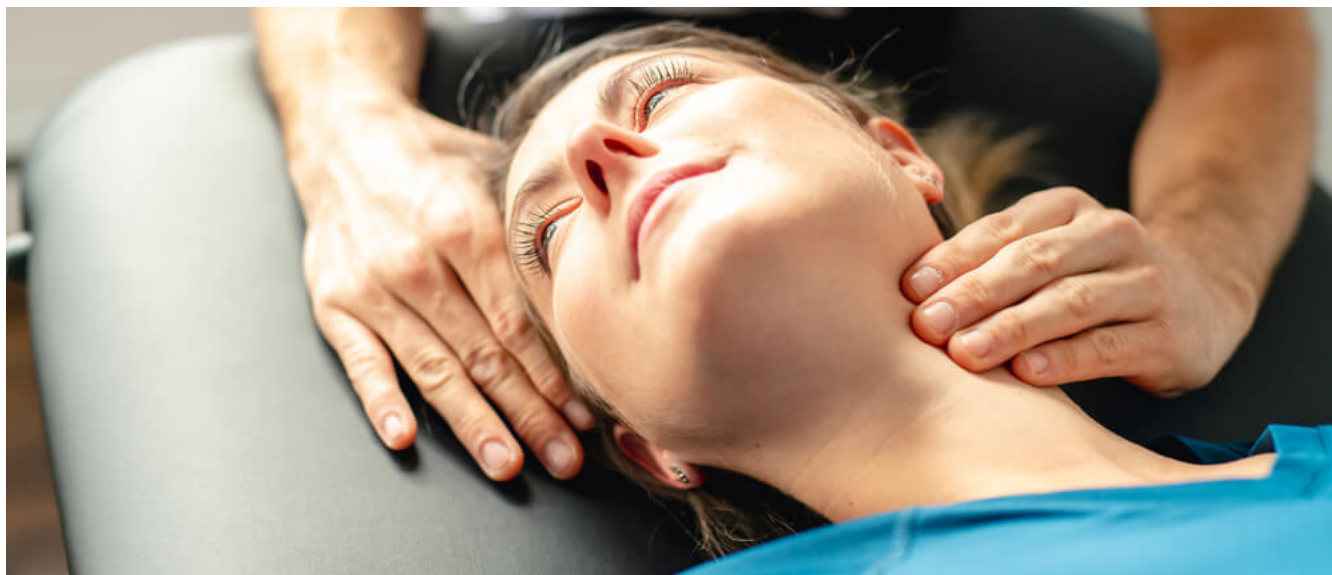
Exercise 2

Stand at a doorway with your arms up at shoulder height and your elbows bent 90°. Place your arms on either side of the door frame and gently lean your body forward to feel a stretch across the front of your chest. Hold for 30 seconds and repeat 3 times. This stretch will help to loosen the muscles across the front of the chest which will take the pressure off the upper back.

TIP NUMBER 8

PHYSIOTHERAPY

Consult a physiotherapist for an individualised treatment programme



Physio for an individualised treatment programme

An expert physiotherapist will be able to diagnose your exact problem and tailor a treatment programme specifically for your needs. For persistent upper back pain there is likely an underlying issue involving the joints, discs, or nerves and unless this is identified and dealt with, the pain or stiffness in your upper back is unlikely to just go away. A programme consisting of hands-on treatment, techniques to desensitize muscles and nerves, and exercise will get your back pain resolved.

PHYSIO

HANDS-ON

Soft tissue and joint mobilisation

DESENSITIZE

Dry needling, DTM, neuromodulation

EXERCISE

Specific to your exact needs

STUBBORN BACK PAIN



Putting these top tips into action is the best start you can make to deal with your lupper back pain. Little changes like the ones suggested can make a big difference.

If your back pain is stubborn and fails to resolve completely, even when following these tips, then it probably needs some extra help to push it in the right direction.

At Gold Standard Physiotherapy we have specialist back pain physiotherapists who can help you to understand your problem and work with you to resolve it.

We do many specialist treatments for back pain, sciatica, and disc pain and although every case is different, every case can be effectively treated to reduce or completely eradicate your symptoms.



Gold Standard Physiotherapy is a physiotherapy clinic located at The Kilcolman Event Centre @ Burgess GAA, Kilcolman Nenagh, Tipperary E45YH76. We facilitate our own local communities of Nenagh, North Tipperary, East Clare and East Limerick.

If you would like to speak to one of our physio's, please feel free to ring and we can have a chat for advice for what's the best route going forward with you.

We are members of the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists, and members of the Chartered Physiotherapists in Musculoskeletal Therapy and also members of the Chartered Physiotherapists in Sports and Exercise Medicine.

We are CORU registered healthcare professionals.

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