

# BetterBack😊

## Information on Low Back Pain



### Low Back Pain

Low back pain (LBP) is a common harmless condition that affects almost everyone at some point. Over a one-year period, 4 out of 10 adults experience LBP. It is often characterised by varying degrees of pain and discomfort that may impact on ability to perform activities. An episode of LBP usually improves within 2-6 weeks. Most have a fairly stable pattern of back health for many years, which may sometimes be interrupted by a period of LBP. This is a normal pattern and does not mean that the condition is getting worse over time.

### Degenerative changes in the spine

Something that astonishes many is that there is no direct connection between degenerative changes in the spine and common LBP. This means that changes seen on X-rays, magnetic cameras and computer tomography can show pronounced age related changes or disc herniation in a completely painless person, while someone with LBP may have very little or no changes.

### The structure and function of the lower back and common causes of LBP

The lower back consists of many structures such as bones, joints, discs, stabilising ligaments, nerves, as well as deep and superficial muscles. Pain sensations may potentially be signalled by one or more structures of the lower back. It is often difficult to specify exactly if and which structures signal pain sensations. How we maintain an upright position in different situations is called posture. An optimal posture means that the spine has the best conditions for good mobility with optimal distribution of body weight. Suboptimal posture, suboptimal loading of the back or even too little loading of the back can be possible contributing factors of LBP.

### Experience of back pain

Pain is first experienced when interpreted in the brain. How the pain is interpreted depends on experience, thoughts, feelings and expectations. In some cases, pain may be experienced in the lower back but in the absence of pain signals from structures in the lower back. The pain system may also become hypersensitive and in some cases the pain can persist even though the original cause of the pain has resolved.



*Figure 1. Pain is interpreted in the brain. This can be in the presence or absence of signals from lower back structures*  
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### Back pain symptoms

In addition to back pain, you may have pain in the buttocks and in one or both legs. You may have difficulty standing, sitting, walking, bending etc. This can lead to frustration, depressed mood and anxiety. Some may be afraid of physical activity and become inactive. All of this can impact negatively on your everyday life.

### Tips when you have a particularly troublesome period

Think about what you have read in this brochure, that pain comes in periods but usually calms down. Also think about what relieves the symptoms and what you can do when you have a troublesome period. You may have a favorite exercise or other strategy to manage troublesome periods. Contact your physiotherapist for help if you feel after 2-6 weeks that pain doesn't subside. If you have numbness and tingling in both legs, loss of skin sensation or weak muscles in the legs and feet and especially if you have trouble controlling your bladder and bowel you should seek medical care. If you have LBP after an accident or have been previously treated for cancer or osteoporosis, it is also important to seek medical care. For the vast majority, however, back pain is a harmless and common condition that comes and goes.

### Back Health

Good back health is a balance between the back's capacity on one side of the scale and physical / mental stresses on the other side as in the figure below.

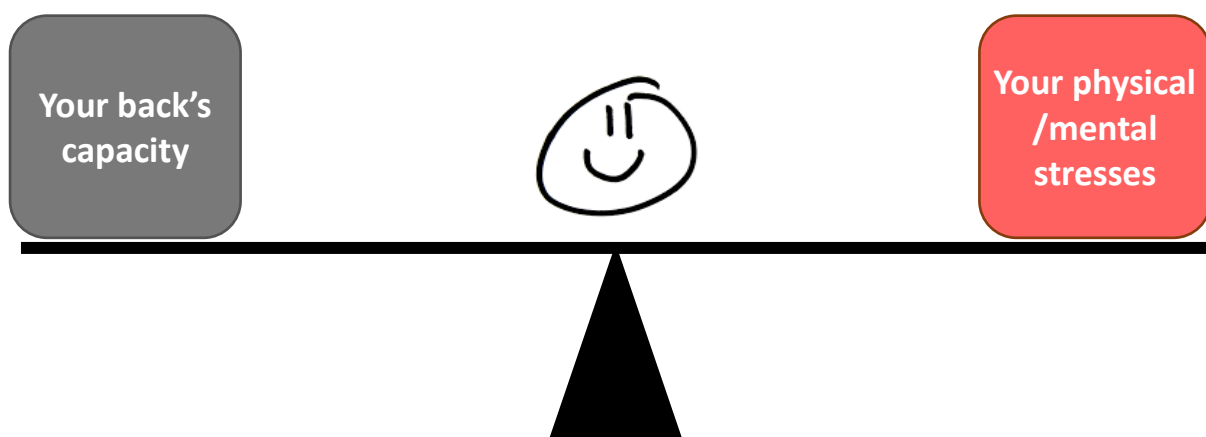


Figure 2. Balance between back capacity and stresses

Back pain occurs when imbalance occurs between back capacity compared to physical / mental stresses as in the figure below.

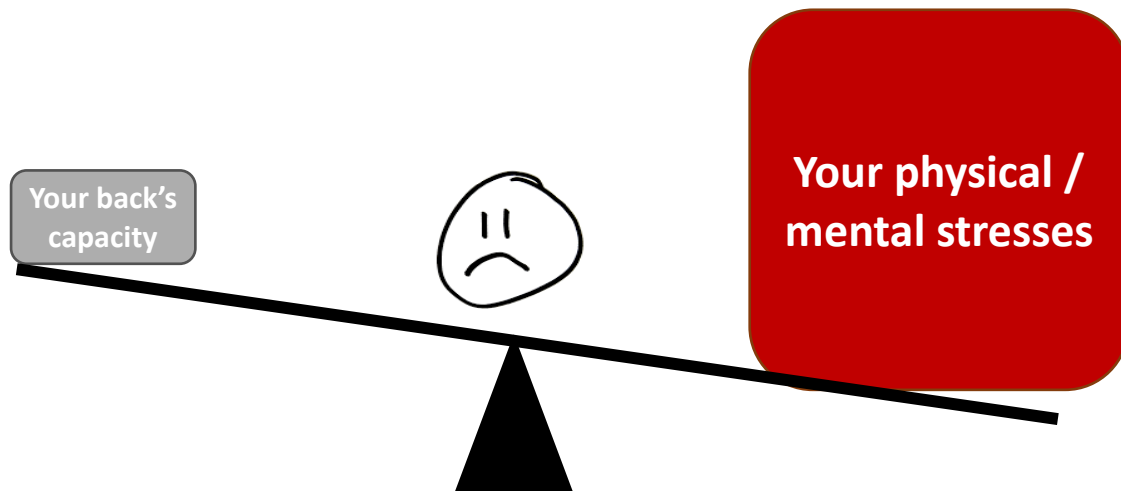


Figure 3. Imbalance between back capacity compared to physical / mental stresses

#### General advice / self-care

During the acute phase, most people are in need to take it easy and adjust their physical and mental stresses. Today, however, there is extensive research that recommends avoiding bedrest and instead modifying physical activity and successively returning to normal activities as quickly as possible. You can use a pain management scale to find the right level of back physical and mental stresses during everyday activities and also when you work out. This model is based on keeping you within acceptable perceived pain levels during an activity and within 24 hours after activity. This means that activity may increase the pain within acceptable pain levels during or after training, but it should return to initial levels within 24 hours. If you are unsure about the right level of back physical and mental stresses consult your physiotherapist.

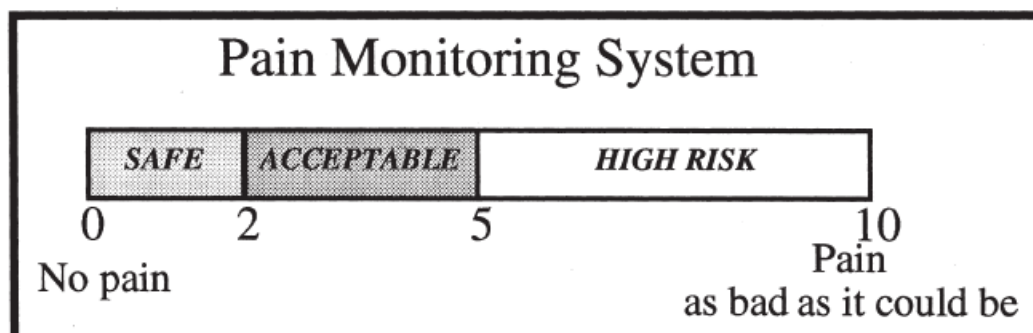


Bild 4. During activity, it is preferable that the pain is within safe to acceptable levels and that the pain returns to initial levels within 24 hours

### Treatment for back pain

The goal is to increase your back's capacity and reduce your physical and mental stresses. You can increase your back's capacity by optimising your back posture, muscle strength, muscle endurance, agility, and improving your overall fitness. You can reduce your physical and mental stresses by optimising your back's physical loads, reducing negative emotions through a positive approach and reducing everyday stress and changing your thoughts about your LBP

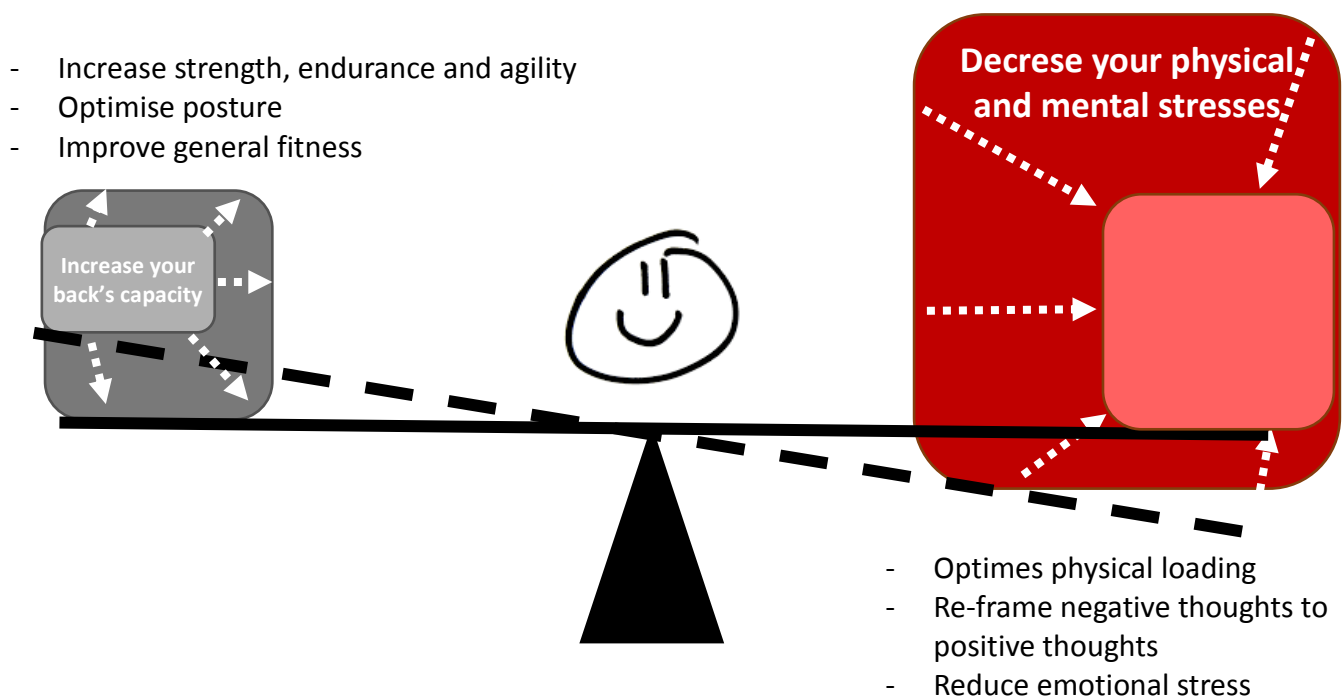


Figure 5. How to balance the back's capacity and stresses

### The BetterBack<sup>©</sup> model of care

The BetterBack<sup>©</sup> model of care for LBP focuses on evidence based physiotherapy, patient education and exercise. The main aim is to manage LBP symptoms and enable the patient's self-care ability. You will receive a thorough assessment and individualised care. Depending on your need for extended support in addition to your physiotherapist's initial interventions, pain education seminars and supervised exercise in a group format can be provided at some clinics. The pain education seminars include explanatory models of what pain is, different ways of managing pain, as well as how to balance your back capacity and your physical and mental stresses you are exposed to. It is common for people to become less physically active after a troublesome period of LBP. It is therefore important to get started with some form of general fitness training. You can improve general fitness by walking, Nordic walking, cycling, jogging and swimming. If you experience pain during activity, you can use the pain management scale (see Figure 4). It is important

that you feel motivated and can adapt your training to fit into your everyday life. In the BetterBack<sup>©</sup> model of care program, you can get help on how to get started!

