

Clinical Guidelines for the Management of Acute Low Back Pain

Key Patient Information Points

- Simple Backache - give positive messages
 - o There is nothing to worry about. Backache is very common.
 - o No sign of any serious damage or disease. Full recovery in days or weeks - but may vary.
 - o No permanent weakness. Recurrence possible - but does not mean re-injury.
 - o Activity is helpful, too much rest is not. Hurting does not mean harm.
- Nerve Root Pain - give guarded positive messages.
 - o No cause for alarm. No sign of disease.
 - o Conservative treatment should suffice - but may take a month or two.
 - o Full recovery expected - but recurrence possible.
- Possible Serious Spinal Pathology - avoid negative messages
 - o Some tests are needed to make the diagnosis.
 - o Often these tests are negative
 - o The specialist will advise on the best treatment.
 - o Rest or activity avoidance until appointment to see specialist.

Patient Booklet

The above messages can be enhanced by an educational booklet given at consultation. The Back Book is an evidence-based booklet developed for use with these guidelines, and is The Stationery Office. (ISBN 011 702 0788)

Psychosocial 'Yellow Flags'

When conducting assessment, it may be useful to consider psychosocial 'yellow flags' (beliefs or behaviours on the part of the patient which may predict poor outcomes).

The following factors are important and consistently predict poor outcomes:

- a belief that back pain is harmful or potentially severely disabling
- fear-avoidance behaviour and reduced activity levels
- tendency to low mood and withdrawal from social interaction
- expectation of passive treatment(s) rather than a belief that active participation will help