



## Looking after your back when caring for children with complex needs

Back pain is common - 84% of us will experience it at some point in our lives - but the good news is that it normally resolves reasonably quickly and is rarely dangerous.

We know there are a number of factors that may contribute to back pain:

- How used to the activity you are
- Stress
- Sleep
- Exercise
- Beliefs

It is always worth trying to address these if you feel they may be contributing to your pain. Seek support from a healthcare professional if you are unsure how to start.

### Things to consider

- Do you lift/move/support the child often and are you used to this?
- Do you have limited space when you lift/move/support them? Is there somewhere with more space you could use?
- Is your child difficult to hold or do they move unpredictably?
- Do you have equipment that could make the lift/ moving the child easier?

### Lifting tips

- Use equipment to help you where possible – talk to your local Physiotherapist or Occupational Therapist for advice or if you are struggling
- Plan the lift and have equipment close and ready
- Keep your child close to you if you can

### Some back pain facts

- Backs are not that vulnerable to damage- they are designed to move, lift, twist and can adapt to different activities
- Backs love movement, inactivity is more likely to cause discomfort
- Backs are designed for bending & lifting – it's important to lift in a way that is comfortable & efficient for you
- Scans are rarely needed
- Keeping active and gradually returning to activities aids recovery, while prolonged rest is unhelpful
- EXERCISE IS HELPFUL – the best exercise is something you enjoy – walk, run, swim, cycle, pilates, yoga, ideally 30 minutes a day; but anything is better than nothing.
- Always contact a health professional if symptoms persist.

Please note: This document is for guidance only. Please discontinue the exercises if they worsen your symptoms, and seek medical advice from your GP or local Physiotherapy service if you are concerned and/or have longstanding pain.

This leaflet was made in collaboration with Very Special Kids Australia.



## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

If you present with any of the following symptoms, you should seek medical advice immediately as they can be symptoms of cauda equina syndrome. Cauda equina syndrome is where the nerves at the bottom of the back (called the 'cauda equina' – 'horse's tail' in Latin) get compressed. It is very rare (6-10 per million population) but may lead to permanent presence of the symptoms below if not treated promptly.

### Bladder Symptoms:

- Inability to urinate
- Difficulty initiating urination
- Loss of sensation when you pass urine
- Inability to stop or control urination
- Loss of sensation of having a full bladder

### Bowel symptoms:

- Inability to stop a bowel movement
- Constipation
- Loss of sensation when passing a bowel motion

### Saddle Anaesthesia:

- Loss of feeling between the top of your legs (in your saddle area)
- Numbness in or around the back passage and / or genitals
- Inability to feel the toilet paper when wiping

### Sexual Problems:

- Inability to achieve an erection or ejaculate
- Loss of sensation during intercourse
- Loss of clitoral sensation

### Leg symptoms:

- Recent onset of pain, weakness, or numbness in both legs

#### Sources:

NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence) CKS (2020) Back pain - low (without radiculopathy).

<https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/back-pain-low-without-radiculopathy/diagnosis/red-flag-symptoms-signs/>

British Association of Spine Surgeons (2019). Cauda Equina Syndrome. <https://spinesurgeons.ac.uk/Cauda-Equina-Syndrome>

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (2017) Clinical update: cauda equina syndrome.

<https://www.csp.org.uk/frontline/article/clinical-update-cauda-equina-syndrome>

Cauda Equina Champions Charity (2021) CES made simple.

<https://www.championscharity.org.uk/ces-made-simple>

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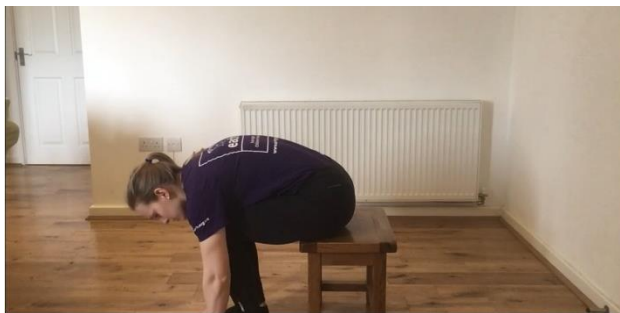
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### Exercise ideas for back mobility in sitting

1. Pelvic tilt – tilt your pelvis forwards (arch your back) and backwards (slump forwards) x10



2. Bend and Extend- Bend forwards and extend backwards in sitting x10



3. Side bends - Bend side to side in sitting x10



4. Archer rotations – arms up in front of you and rotate your body with your arms moving as if you are pulling a bow and arrow



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### Exercise ideas for back mobility on the floor

1. Knee rolls – Lie on your back with your knees bent and roll them side to side x10



2. Knee hugs – Bring one or both knees up to your chest. Hold for 30 seconds.



3. Cat/camel – on all fours, arch your back and then dip your back down x10



4. Thread the needle – on all fours, pass one arm through along the floor under your opposite arm to rotate your body x10



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