Further information

This information does not replace medical advice from your GP. If in doubt, check with your GP or health professional.

Seek early attention from your GP if you experience any of the following:

- Severe constant (24 hours a day) back pain
- Severe back pain with leg pain and weakness or changes in sensation extending into the leg/s
- Loss of bowel and bladder control
- Numbness in the genital area or buttocks
- Fever
- Need continuous pain-relieving medicine for more than a few days.

MY HEALTH PROFESSIONAL'S CONTACT DETAILS ARE:

NAME:

PHONE:

These messages have been developed by the Musculoskeletal Health Network, Department of Health (WA) and are supported by the following professional bodies:

- Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (Faculty of Pain Medicine)
- Australian Clinical Psychology Association
- Australian Osteopathic Association
- Australian Pain Society
- Australian Physiotherapy Association
- Australian Rheumatology Association (WA)
- Chiropractors' Association of Australia
- Health Consumers' Council
- Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (WA)
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

Useful web sites

www.selfmanagement.health.wa.gov.au/

www.healthnetworks.health.wa.gov.au/modelsofcare/

www.chronicpainaustralia.org/

www.painmanagement.org.au/

www.imagingpathways.health.wa.gov.au/includes/dipmenu/backpain/chart.html/

www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/cp94syn.htm

www.backpaineurope.org/

This document can be made available in alternative formats such as computer disc, audio tape or Braille, on request for a person with a disability.

Produced by Health Networks Branch
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HP11918 NOV'10

Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**

Consumer's guide to managing back pain

This guide is for consumers with back pain who want to know more about how to effectively manage their pain.

Here are some important messages to help you manage your back pain:

- there is a lot you can do yourself to manage your pain
- most people recover fully
- stay active if possible: moving helps reduce pain
- maintain your usual activities
- stay at work if possible
- stay positive
- avoid prolonged bed rest
- Xrays or other imaging are usually not required.

Are you experiencing back pain?

Ask yourself the following four questions regarding your back pain. **Tick your response to the following questions.**

In regard to your back pain, are you:

	1. Taking control?		2. Staying positive?
☐	Yes	☐	Yes
☐	No	☐	No
☐	Sometimes	☐	Sometimes

	3. Staying active?		4. Staying at work?
☐	Yes	☐	Yes
☐	No	☐	No
☐	Sometimes	☐	Sometimes

If you have answered YES to all four questions…you are doing what is necessary to manage your back pain as suggested by current evidence. So well done!

If you have answered SOMETIMES, to most questions, please have a look at some of the suggestions on how you can better manage your back pain.

If you have answered NO to most questions, please consider seeking further advice from your health professional on how you can better manage your back pain.

To understand more on back pain, please continue reading the sections on "Types of back pain" and "What you need to know".

Types of back pain:

1. Acute back pain

Most acute or 'new' (less than 6 weeks) back pain goes away within a few weeks. Experts worldwide agree that the best approach is to stay active, stay at work and stay engaged in your usual daily activities. This approach can reduce your chance of ongoing pain and disability.

What you need to know:

- stay active and think positively
- pace your activities and your exercise (do little bits often)
- stay at work: modifying your work tasks might be required
- ice or hot packs can be helpful in the first few weeks
- Paracetamol or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications may help
- experiencing some back pain as you recover is usual
- pain does not necessarily mean more damage
- Xrays, CT and MRI are not usually necessary.

If your pain *persists* beyond a few weeks, or you experience any of the symptoms listed on the back cover of this brochure, we recommend that you consult with your health professional.

2. Chronic back pain

Chronic back pain is pain that persists beyond three months. Completing some simple questionnaires can help make sense of why your back pain is persisting. Ask your health professional about this *as soon as possible*. Being afraid of back pain or worrying that pain means more damage can stop you moving normally, can lower your mood and slow your recovery. Taking active control of your pain *early* means you have a better chance of recovery and a reduced level of disability.

What you need to know:

- it's your back; you take control
- stay positive, stay engaged with friends and family, stay at work
- usual daily movements and gentle stretching can help you recover
- avoid the boom and bust cycle - that means pacing your activities
- seek help early if you are fearful, anxious, stressed or depressed
- relaxation strategies and mindfulness meditation can help you cope better
- pain medications used properly can help you to stay active and sleep better
- you may need to see a specialist pain team for advice – ask your health professional.