Simple exercises

**Back stretch**
Lie on your back, hands above your head. Bend your knees and roll them slowly to one side, keeping your feet on the floor. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each side.

**Deep Lunge**
Kneel on one knee, the other foot in front. Facing forwards, lift the back knee up. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each side.

**One-leg stand (front)**
Holding onto something for support if needed, bend one leg up behind you. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times on each side.

**Pelvic tilt**
Lie down with your knees bent. Tighten your stomach muscles, flattening your back against the floor. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times.

**Knees to chest**
Lie on your back, knees bent. Bring one knee up and pull it gently into your chest for 5 seconds. Repeat up to 5 times on each side.

**Summary**
- Back pain is common but most cases aren’t caused by a serious problem.
- Most cases of back pain get better on their own within a few weeks.
- Stay active. Bed rest for more than a couple of days makes it harder to get going. Gradually increase your normal activities and do regular exercise.
- Take painkillers if needed so you can stay active.

**Your pain should ease within 2 weeks and you should recover over approximately a 4–6 week period.**
You should carry on with the exercises for at least 6–8 weeks to help prevent another injury.
If the pain is severe or not improving after a week or so, contact your doctor.
How does the back work?
The back is a complicated structure built around the bones of the spinal column. The spinal column consists of 24 bones (vertebrae) sitting one on top of another. It sits on the pelvis and is topped by the skull. The bones of the spine are connected by discs at the front and facet joints at the back. The discs help to absorb loads on the spine and, with the facet joints, give the spinal column its flexibility.

What causes back pain?

Sprains and strains
Back pain isn’t usually a sign of a serious medical condition – it’s much more likely that an awkward movement has pulled a muscle or sprained a ligament. Simple cases often improve within 4–6 weeks. Staying active and getting on with normal activities is one of the best ways to deal with back pain, but you can take painkillers if you need to. It’s very important to exercise the affected muscle to improve its strength, although you should rest if the muscle is in spasm. Unless you’re in severe pain you probably won’t need to see a doctor.

Sciatica
Back pain is sometimes linked with pains in the leg which are called sciatica. It affects the sciatic nerve that runs from the spine to the leg. The pain is felt anywhere from the buttock to the big toe. Other symptoms include numbness and tingling in the legs and feet.

Sciatica is caused by an irritation of the sciatic nerve – there’s nothing wrong with the leg itself. If you notice weakness of the muscles in your leg, especially if you can’t pull your foot up towards you, or if you lose bladder or bowel control, you should see your doctor urgently.

What can be done to help?

Exercise
Exercise is the most important way that you can:
• ease stiffness and pain