



## WHO'S GOT YOUR BACK?

Could lower back pain be the reason CROCS are staging a comeback?

If you've ever had the misfortune of suffering with any form of back pain, you'll recognise the sheer relief of slip on shoes! With 2.5 million people in the UK suffering from back pain *every day*, the best thing you can do is prevent yourself from joining that statistic.

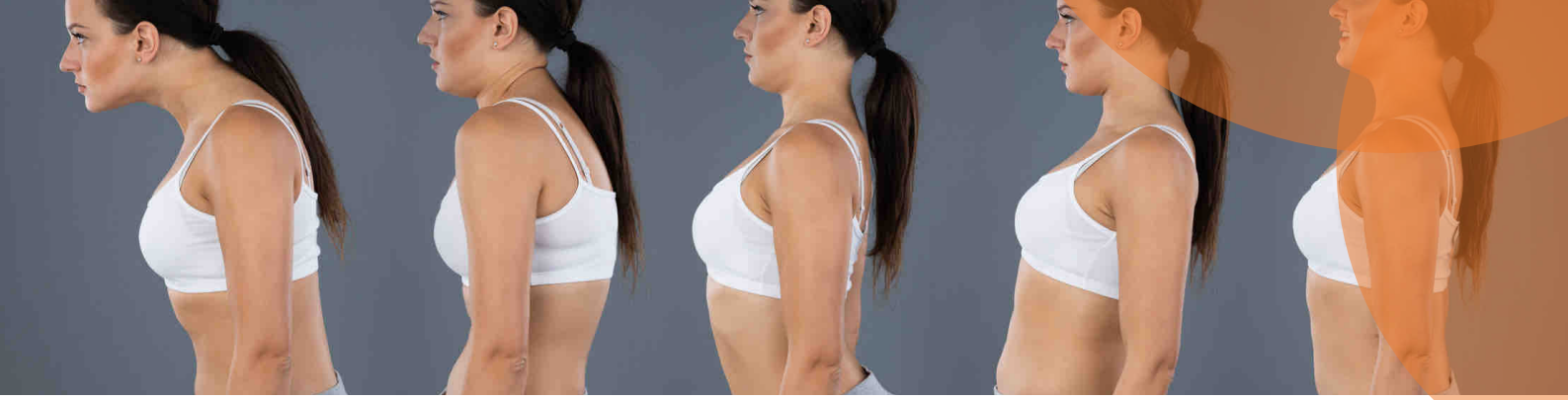


### FIRST, LET'S COVER THE BASICS OF HOW YOUR BACK WORKS

The spine, which is also called the backbone or spinal column, is one of the strongest parts of the body and gives us a great deal of flexibility and strength. It's made up of 24 bones, known as vertebrae, one sitting on top of the other. These bones have discs in between and lots of strong ligaments and muscles around them for support. There are also the bones in the tailbone at the bottom of the back, which are fused together and have no discs in between.

On either side of the spine, running from top to bottom, are many small joints called the facet joints. The spinal cord passes inside the vertebrae, which protect it. The spinal cord connects to the brain through the base of the skull and to the rest of the body by nerves that pass through spaces between the bones of the spine. These nerves are also known as nerve roots. As you grow older, the structures of your spine, such as the joints, discs and ligaments, age as well. The structures stay strong but it's usual for your back to get stiffer as you get older.

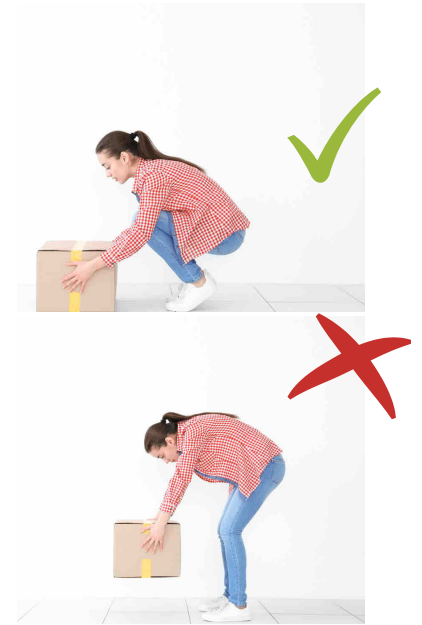
According to the NHS, back pain can have many causes. It's not always obvious what causes it, and it often gets better on its own. A common cause of back pain is a pulled muscle. Sometimes, medical conditions like a slipped disc, trapped nerve or ankylosing spondylitis can cause back pain; and very rarely, back pain can be a sign of a severe problem such as a broken bone, cancer, or an infection.



## NOW FOR THE PRACTICAL APPROACH

### PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

- Always aim to keep the normal S-shape curves of your spine in place for most of the day.
- Try to avoid hunching up your shoulders or slumping forward causing your spine to form an unhealthy C-shape.
- Take frequent breaks to move around as much as you can. Try not to remain in a single fixed position for more than 30 minutes.
- Tuck in your abdominals as much as you can, especially when lifting something.
- To pick up heavy objects, bend your knees and keep your back straight, never bend over. Try to keep objects near to your body as you pick them up.



### POSTURE CHECK

- Balance weight on feet – imagine your weight evenly distributed over a triangle (big toe, little toe, heel)
- Soft knees & Neutral pelvis
- 30% abdominal contraction
- Soft V – shoulders and upper back
- Arms slightly to front, thumbs pointing forwards
- Crown of head pointing to ceiling - imagine a string from the top of your head connected to the ceiling.



Source of the image: <https://www.braceability.com>



## NOW FOR THE PRACTICAL APPROACH

### TO REDUCE PAIN

- Try to keep up your normal daily activities. Gentle exercise will strengthen your back muscles and improve flexibility. Avoid strenuous exercise such as aerobics.
- Try to avoid lifting heavy weights. Make several short trips to the shop rather than trying to carry heavy groceries all in one go.
- When sitting, both your feet should be resting on the ground. Do not cross your legs.
- If, after a few days, your pain persists, visit a qualified manipulative therapist such as an osteopath, chiropractor or physiotherapist.

### OFFICE EXERCISE

- Pull in your chin slightly and turn your head slowly to one side, without jerking it, before turning it to the opposite side. Repeat 3-4 times.
- Raise your shoulders up towards your ears then push them back and relax. Repeat 2-3 times.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles as you breathe out fully and count to five before releasing.
- When you are having a break from sitting down, stand with your feet apart and place your hands in the small of your back. Keeping your knees straight, push your hips forward gently and your shoulders back. This will release tension in the spine.

### HOME EXERCISE

#### Rolling like a ball:

- Sit up tall with knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
- Contract abdominals to 30% and adopt neutral position.
- Slight pelvic tilt to roll back, keep head slightly tucked in.
- Roll back up to seated position and repeat.
- Inhale to roll back, exhale to roll up.



If you have persistent back pain then seek professional help from a manipulative specialist such as chiropractor, osteopath, physiotherapist or talk to your GP for advice.

Please ensure that you have completed your Display Screen Equipment training and Self-Assessment on 'My Learning'. For any help or support please contact [OccupationalHealth@Harbourenergy.com](mailto:OccupationalHealth@Harbourenergy.com) or the Wellbeing page on the Intranet.

