

PAIN & INJURY GUIDE

Aches from driving or long journeys: your 5-minute routine



Scan for the full guide

Quick movements to do at a stop to ease the back, neck and hips after long spells of sitting in the car.

How often: Do these whenever you stop, and as a set routine once you are home.

Total time: about 5 minutes. **You will need:** a sturdy chair, a firm, comfortable surface to lie on (a bed or mat).

Before you start

- This is general information based on NHS physiotherapy leaflets. It is not a personal treatment plan. If a doctor, physiotherapist or osteopath has given you different advice, follow that.
- Move slowly and smoothly. Mild discomfort or a stretching feeling is fine. Sharp pain is not.
- The pain should settle back to your usual level within an hour or two. If it is worse the next day, do fewer repeats or a smaller movement, or leave that exercise out for a few days.

Your routine

1

Stand up and move

about 1 min

Get up, walk around or stretch for a minute or two. Do this regularly through the day, especially after long spells of sitting.

How much: A minute or two, regularly through the day

2

Chest stretch

about 1 min

Sit forward on your chair with your arms by your sides and thumbs pointing forwards. Open your arms out to the sides until you feel a stretch across your chest. Keep your shoulders back and down.

How much: Hold 20 seconds, 2 times

3

Seated trunk turn

about 1 min

Sit tall with your arms crossed over your chest. Gently turn your upper body to one side, come back to the middle, then turn to the other side.

How much: 5 each way

4

Pelvic tilt

about 1 min

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat. Gently rock your pelvis so your lower back flattens, then let it arch slightly. Move slowly and only as far as is comfortable.

How much: 10 slow repeats (pause for up to 5 seconds at each end)

5

Knee to chest

about 1 min

Lie on your back with your knees bent. Draw one knee towards your chest, with your hands behind the thigh. Lower it and swap legs.

How much: Hold 5 seconds, up to 10 times, swapping legs

Good to know

- Take regular breaks on long journeys. Stop in a safe place before you do the exercises.

Easier, or harder?

- Too sore? Do fewer repeats, make the movement smaller, or miss that exercise out for a few days.
- Feeling good? Only add a few repeats, or a second set, when the routine feels easy and comfortable. There is no rush.

Keep track

Tick a box each day you do your routine.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Get urgent help first, and do not exercise, if you have any of these

Call 999 or go to A&E straight away if you have back pain together with any of these. They can be signs of a rare but serious condition such as cauda equina syndrome. Do not drive yourself.

- Numbness or tingling around your genitals, buttocks or inner thighs (the saddle area)
- Difficulty passing urine, loss of bladder or bowel control, or being unable to feel when you are passing urine or stool
- Pain, tingling, weakness or numbness in both legs, or sciatica on both sides, or weakness in a leg that is getting worse
- New changes to sexual sensation or function alongside back or leg pain
- Chest pain, or back pain that started after a serious accident such as a car crash

See your GP promptly, or call NHS 111, if

- Feeling hot, cold, shivery or generally unwell, or severe pain that starts suddenly or quickly gets worse
- Unexplained weight loss, or a lump, swelling or change in the shape of your back
- Pain that is worse at night or does not ease with rest, or is worse when you cough, sneeze or open your bowels
- A history of cancer and new, persistent back pain

Stop these exercises if

- Never do these while driving. Pull over safely first, and do the lying-down movements only once you are home.
- If you are not improving after about 4 weeks, or things are getting worse sooner, get it checked. A GP, physiotherapist or osteopath can assess what is going on and adjust your exercises.

Want your problem assessed?

If you would like your symptoms assessed, you are welcome to book an appointment with Lance Peterson Osteopathy in Chichester: lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/book.html · 07899 358698. Osteopathic care is not right for everyone, and if something needs medical attention first, you will be told.

The full plain-English guide, with the common questions and sources, is at:

lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/guide/aches-from-driving-and-long-journeys.html

Based on

The exercises are described in my own words from these NHS and Chartered Society of Physiotherapy resources. Repeats and holds are kept to the gentle, beginner end of the ranges they give. Links were checked in October 2026.

- NHS: Physical activity guidelines for adults aged 19 to 64
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-guidelines/physical-activity-guidelines-for-adults-aged-19-to-64/>
- Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS: Desk exercises
<https://ourspace.rjah.nhs.uk/personal-fitness/desk-exercises/>
- Cambridge University Hospitals NHS: Thoracic spine exercises
<https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/patient-information/thoracic-spine-exercises/>
- University Hospitals Sussex NHS Trust: Low back pain (2025)
<https://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/864.2-Low-back-pain-2025.pdf>
- NHS: Back pain
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/>