



Health Group

Living with Back Pain Report



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Foreword

Circle Health Group



Circle Health Group's Living with Back Pain Report explores how back pain affects people across the UK, from sleep to mental wellbeing.

To find out, we surveyed 2,000 adults across the UK. The results are fascinating and delve into what it is like to live with back pain, how it impacts daily life, and whether people are seeking professional help.

The objective of this report is to share data insights about and tangible advice for living with back pain. It is not an issue that only affects older people, as our research shows. While it's clear that living with persistent or recurring back pain can impact people's mental health, there are options for seeking help and managing pain.



An introductory note from Paul Manning, Chief Executive Officer at Circle Health Group

"As a healthcare provider, we know first-hand how debilitating back pain can be. Across the UK, hundreds of thousands of individuals are living with the impact of back pain daily. As a doctor myself, I feel a sense of duty and a profound responsibility to shed light on the impact this relatively common condition is having on all ages.

"It is easy to highlight an issue, however, our findings show that often the greatest obstacle to living pain-free is simply not knowing that help is available and, crucially, that it is simpler than many think to manage back pain.

"My hope is that this report will support thousands of patients across the UK to seek the advice, support and treatment they need to live a life that is free from back pain.

"I am extremely proud to be leading an organisation like Circle Health Group. At the core of our mission is a commitment to using our platform to shed light on critical issues like this."

Meet the experts

As part of this report, we have spoken to a range of experts at Circle Health Group. Our experts have commented on the findings and will be offering helpful advice on living with back pain and when to seek help.



Paul Manning,
Chief Executive Officer,
Circle Health Group

Paul is a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon and leading shoulder specialist who joined Circle in 2005. He has held a number of senior leadership roles across Circle Health Group, including Medical Director and Chief Medical Officer, before becoming Chief Executive Officer in July 2025.

He has held positions with the British Elbow and Shoulder Society and British Orthopaedic Association, and was appointed to the Government's Elective Recovery Taskforce in 2023. Paul has also played a key role in driving quality and safety initiatives, including Circle Health Group's adoption of the GIRFT programme to improve patient outcomes and experience.



Neil Orpen,
Consultant Spinal Surgeon

Neil is a fellowship-trained spinal surgeon who specialises exclusively in conditions of the spine. He completed specialist orthopaedic and spinal surgical training in Oxford and Bristol, with further advanced training in complex spinal procedures in the UK and Europe.

He has particular expertise in minimally invasive and microsurgical techniques, with specialist interests in spinal tumours and fractures, back and neck pain, disc replacement and spinal stenosis.



Daniel Rolton,
Consultant Spinal Surgeon

Daniel is an international trained spinal surgeon working at Circle Reading. He has over a decade of experience in adult spinal surgery.

He has a special interest in degenerative conditions of the spine resulting in back pain, nerve pain, sciatica, stenosis and spondylolisthesis. His NHS work also involves managing acute conditions affecting the spine such as tumour, infections and trauma affecting the spine.



Deborah Alsina MBE,
Chief Executive,
Arthritis UK

Deborah is an experienced charity executive with more than 30 years' experience in the voluntary sector. She joined Arthritis UK as Chief Executive in 2022, having previously held the same title at leading charities Independent Age and Bowel Cancer UK. Her work at the latter saw her awarded an MBE.

Arthritis UK is the nation's largest arthritis charity, a community-focused organisation that works to ensure better outcomes for people with arthritis now and into the future. It does this by investing in world-class research, delivering high-quality services, and campaigning on issues that matter most to people with arthritis.

Meet the experts

As part of this report, we have spoken to a range of experts at Circle Health Group. Our experts have commented on the findings and will be offering helpful advice on living with back pain and when to seek help.



Liam Stapley,
Senior Physiotherapist

Liam is a Senior Physiotherapist at Huddersfield Private Hospital, with a particular interest in shoulder rehabilitation and return-to-sport programmes. He has experience in MSK physiotherapy and high-performance sports rehabilitation, including an internship with Doncaster Knights.

He is qualified in injection therapy and imaging referral, enabling him to support patients with diagnosis, treatment and onward care.



Anees Gulfraz,
Senior Physiotherapist

Anees is a senior physiotherapist at Highfield hospital in Rochdale. He has gained extensive experience across three major NHS trusts, completing specialist rotations in Trauma and Orthopaedics, Plastic Surgery, Hand Therapy, Chronic Pain Management, Spinal Surgery and Occupational Health. He currently works across wards, outpatients, hand therapy and physiotherapy-led consultant clinics.

A specialist in musculoskeletal health, Anees has particular interests in the hand, spine and temporomandibular disorders. He is able to assess and treat a wide range of conditions, refer for diagnostic imaging and administer therapeutic injections.



Executive summary

Circle Health Group's *Living with Back Pain Report* delves into the nation's experience with recurring or persistent back pain. From mental health to work, this report highlights the impact that living with back pain has on many.

Methodology:

This report examines the results of insights gathered in a UK-wide consumer survey of 2,000 adults, carried out in June 2026.

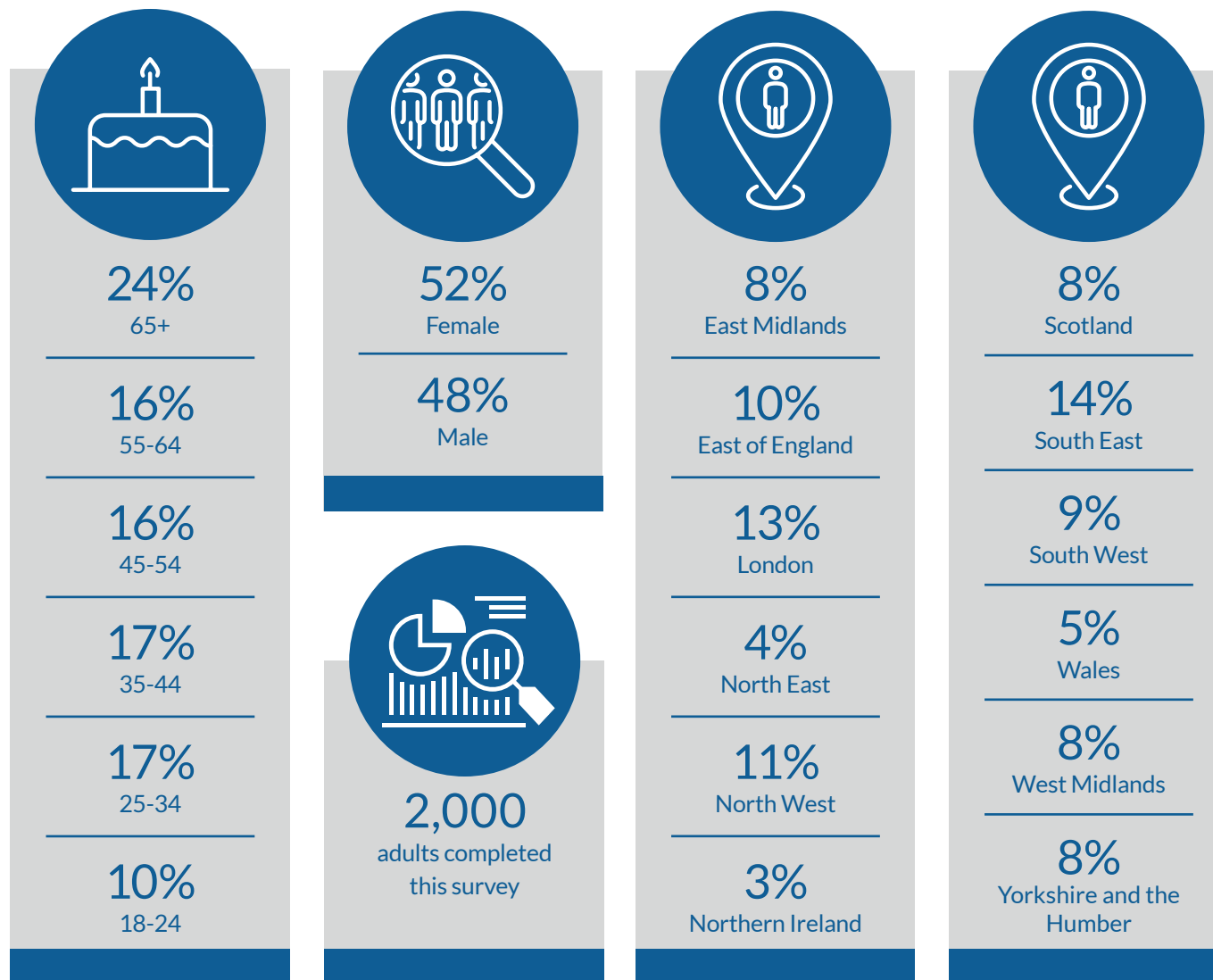
About the respondents:

The largest number of respondents came from London (13%). However, responses were gathered from across the UK.

The split between genders was skewed slightly toward female respondents at 52%, compared to 48% of male respondents.

The largest proportion of respondents were aged 65 and over (24%), followed by ages 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 with 17% of respondents each. The remaining age groups were split more evenly, with ages 45 to 54 and 55 to 64 both having 16% of respondents. Finally, ages 18 to 24 had the lowest segment of respondents at 10%.

About the respondents:



Back pain across the UK

Most people will experience back pain at some point in their lives. In many cases, back pain will get better over time, but sometimes it can last longer or keep coming back.

Our research revealed that 33% of people experience back pain every week. An additional 16% regularly experience back pain after certain activities. In fact, only 7% of respondents reported that they never experience back pain.

For those who have experienced recurring or persistent back pain over the past 12 months, 24% admitted that they experience back pain daily and 28% experience it every few days.

The majority of respondents (46%) reported experiencing mild back pain, which is noticeable but not disruptive. For those who have experienced recurring or persistent pain in the last year, this increases slightly to 50%.

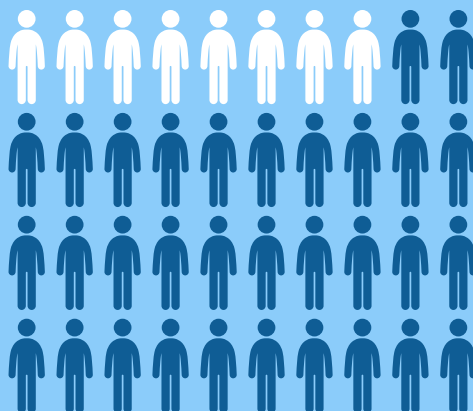
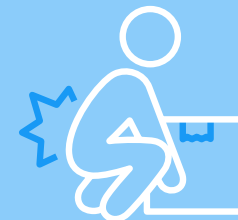
This was followed by 24% reporting that they experience low pain that often goes unnoticed. Unsurprisingly, for those who have experienced recurring or persistent back pain in the last 12 months, this was lower at 10%.

21% experience moderate pain that is persistent and interferes with daily tasks, concentration, or sleep. This rises to 33% for those who have experienced recurring or persistent back pain in the last 12 months.

Finally, just 3% report feeling severe pain that is radiating, sharp, or burning and limits mobility and dominates daily life. However, this increases to 5% for those who have experienced recurring or persistent back pain in the past year.

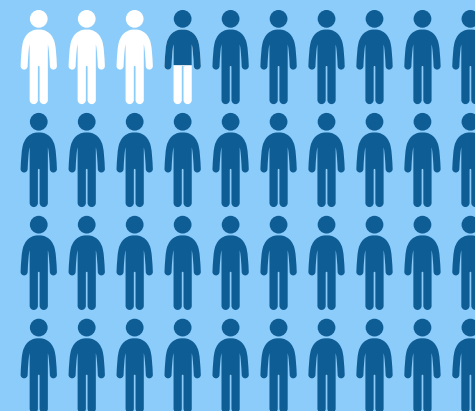
33%

percent of respondents said they experience back pain every week



16%

experienced back pain after certain activities



7%

say they never experience back pain

The severity of this pain was also measured, with respondents reporting



24%

Low pain



46%

Mild pain



21%

Moderate pain



3%

Severe pain

The impact of back pain

Recurring or persistent back pain can significantly impact daily life. It can affect work, sleep, hobbies, relationships, exercise and mental health. This report investigates which elements of everyday life become more challenging when experiencing back pain.

Sleep

Back pain can disrupt sleep, whether it's when trying to fall asleep or waking due to pain during the night. We found that sleep is the area of daily life most commonly affected by back pain, impacting 30% of respondents. Interestingly, 23% of those who suffer with recurring or persistent back pain report that they have poor to very poor quality of sleep most weekday nights, compared to 11% of those who do not.



Pain and sleep have a genuinely two-way relationship: discomfort can make it harder to fall asleep, cause frequent waking as you shift position, and leave mornings feeling stiff and unrested.

Neil Orpen, Consultant Spinal Surgeon



30%

of respondents said sleep is the most commonly affected area of daily life from back pain

Work

Work is another aspect of daily life significantly affected by back pain. On average, Brits report missing an average of 2.5 days of work due to back pain a year. This increases to 3 days for those who have experienced back pain persistently or recurrently over the last year.

When it comes to workplace guidance on back health, 44% of respondents' employers do not currently offer any guidance, equipment, or training for sitting posture. For those whose employers do offer back health guidance, 32% report using it, while 15% have not.



Employers should make it practical for staff to step away from their screen or desk regularly, particularly in roles involving long periods of sitting.

Aneez Gulfraz, Senior Physiotherapist



15%

of respondents said they have not used back health guidance at work

Mental health

If back pain symptoms persist for a long time, not only can your normal daily activities become difficult, but also your mood can feel the impact. Our findings show that for those who have experienced back pain persistently or repeatedly in the last 12 months, 38% have experienced frustration and irritability.



Living with the unpredictability of musculoskeletal pain not only affects your physical health; it impacts your mental health too.

Deborah Alsina, Chief Executive, Arthritis UK



38%

have experienced frustration and irritability



28%

have experienced low mood and depression



18%

have experienced reduced confidence and self-esteem



16%

have experienced worsened anxiety



15%

have felt isolated and withdrawn from social situations

The impact of back pain - expert commentary



**Neil Orpen,
Consultant Spinal
Surgeon:**

It's striking, but not surprising, that sleep is the area of life most affected by back pain.

Pain and sleep have a genuinely two-way relationship: discomfort can make it harder to fall asleep, cause frequent waking as you shift position, and leave mornings feeling stiff and unrested. In turn, poor sleep lowers pain tolerance and increases sensitivity to discomfort the next day, creating a cycle that's hard to break.

Small changes can help: supportive pillows or mattress positioning, gentle stretching before bed, and a consistent wind-down routine to ease tension. Repeated poor sleep can chip away at energy, concentration, mood and confidence in movement, so if disrupted sleep persists over several weeks, or daily tasks remain consistently affected, it's worth discussing with a spinal specialist rather than continuing to manage it alone.



**Anees Gulfraz,
Senior Physiotherapist:**

Employers should make it practical for staff to step away from their screen or desk regularly, particularly in roles involving long periods

of sitting. This does not need to mean lengthy breaks.

Urge your employees to take the time, every 20 to 30 minutes, to release the tension in their shoulders, have a shake, or move around. It can be as simple as encouraging people to refill a water bottle, speak to a colleague in person, collect printing in smaller batches, or build a short walk into the working day.

It is important to create a working environment where staff have regular opportunities to move, know how to raise discomfort early, and can access support before it begins to affect their work.



**Deborah Alsina MBE,
Chief Executive of
Arthritis UK:**

Living with the unpredictability of musculoskeletal pain not only affects your physical

health; it impacts your mental health too. It's not uncommon to feel down, isolated, or overwhelmed, and for some people, ongoing and unpredictable pain may lead to frustration, worry or low mood, particularly when it interferes with everyday life.

Not only does pain affect people's mood, but it can significantly impact daily activities. For example, someone experiencing back pain may have less energy, need additional help, or avoid social activities due to the pain they experience. This can sometimes create misunderstandings or make a person feel isolated.



Back pain management

Pain management can be a personal journey, and there is not one solution that works for everyone. And while most back pain is manageable, it can significantly impact daily life if ignored. That's why it's essential to be aware that the earlier you begin treatment, including taking steps to help yourself, the quicker you can get back to enjoying life.

Our report delves into what methods people currently use to manage their back pain. It found that:



It's completely understandable that rest and over-the-counter painkillers are most people's first port of call when faced with a new episode of back pain, as these are the most accessible, immediate responses when pain strikes.

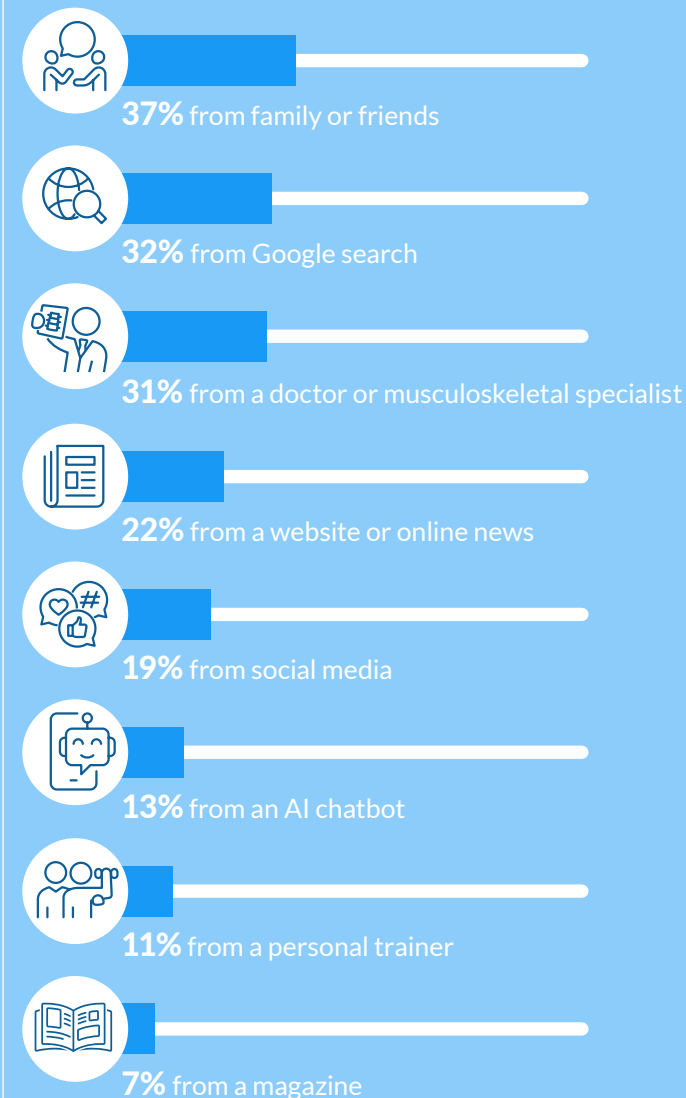
Neil Orpen, Consultant Spinal Surgeon



The study revealed that many have specifically invested in products to help manage their back pain, such as:



Interestingly, it also highlighted where people are getting their product recommendations.



Back pain management - expert commentary



Neil Orpen, Consultant Spinal Surgeon:

It's completely understandable that rest and over-the-counter painkillers are most people's first

port of call when faced with a new episode of back pain, as these are the most accessible, immediate responses when pain strikes. They require no appointment, no specialist knowledge, and offer quick relief, which is exactly what people want in the moment.

The trouble is, this instinct can work against recovery if it becomes the default for too long. Short periods of rest are sensible, but prolonged inactivity often leads to stiffness, deconditioning and, ironically, more pain — the body becomes less confident in movement it was designed to do.

Encouragingly, we can see more people are already using stretching and mobility work and incorporating cardio — both excellent building blocks.

The key is a gradual return to everyday movement: short walks, light stretching, and pacing activity rather than pushing through or avoiding it entirely. If pain persists beyond a few weeks, worsens, or keeps limiting daily life, seeing a spinal specialist can provide tailored, reassuring guidance.

There can be benefits for some people in accessing MRI scanning when back pain is persistent, and it is done by an expert who can interpret the results.



Daniel Rolton, Consultant Spinal Surgeon:

It's understandable that people turn to friends, family, online searches, or AI chatbots when looking

for advice about back pain. These sources are easily accessible and can feel reassuring, particularly because back pain affects so many people. However, while symptoms may appear similar, the underlying cause of back pain can vary significantly from one person to another.

Advice, exercises, or products that worked well for one individual may be ineffective, or even worsen symptoms, for someone else. Search engines and AI tools can only provide guidance based on the information entered and cannot perform a physical examination or assess how a person moves, stands, or responds during an assessment.

An experienced clinician gathers much more information than a digital tool can provide. From observing a patient's posture and movement as soon as they enter the consultation room, to conducting a detailed examination, they can identify potential causes, rule out more serious conditions and recommend a personalised treatment plan.



Preventing back pain

Back pain may be something that is typically associated with older demographics, with 19% of over-65s experiencing daily back pain, compared with 5% of 25–34-year-olds.

However, concerns about back health are more prominent among younger age groups. Our findings show that 39% of 25–34-year-olds worry about developing back pain in old age, while 38% of 35–44-year-olds share this concern. In fact, the over-65s worry the least, at 27%.



Anees Gulfraz, Senior Physiotherapist,
on how to prevent back pain later in life:

The sooner you get active, the better. But there isn't one exercise that guarantees you'll avoid back pain, and you don't need to spend hours in the gym to protect your back. The most effective exercise is one you enjoy and can stick to consistently.

I would recommend a combination of strength and stretching; this way you're building muscle and keeping the body flexible at a minimum. It can be as simple as trying out a new Pilates class or just increasing your daily step count.

Even if you're suffering with persistent back pain, try not to cut out all movement, unless you have been put on bed rest by a professional.



Aspects of ageing that people are most worried about:

52%



Loss of mobility

50%



Memory loss

43%



Illnesses

39%



Joint pain

32%



Financial stability

31%



Back pain

27%



Loneliness

23%



Ability to travel

17%



Missing out on moments in their children/grandchildren's lives

Seeking help

Taking steps towards seeking help can be challenging for many. Our report found that 42% of regular back pain sufferers have sought and received help. But in fact, a larger portion of people (44%) who have experienced recurring or persistent back pain in the last 12 months have not sought any help for their symptoms.

When it comes to the reasons that people have not sought help, many report they didn't feel as though the pain was severe enough (34%), or that they instead relied on self-treatment options (34%).

For those who did seek professional help, 42% called a GP, 37% saw a musculoskeletal specialist, 24% used private healthcare, and 22% saw a consultant back specialist. Interestingly, many also turn to other places for help: 31% spoke with friends or family, 18% have relied on an AI chatbot, and 17% conducted a Google search.



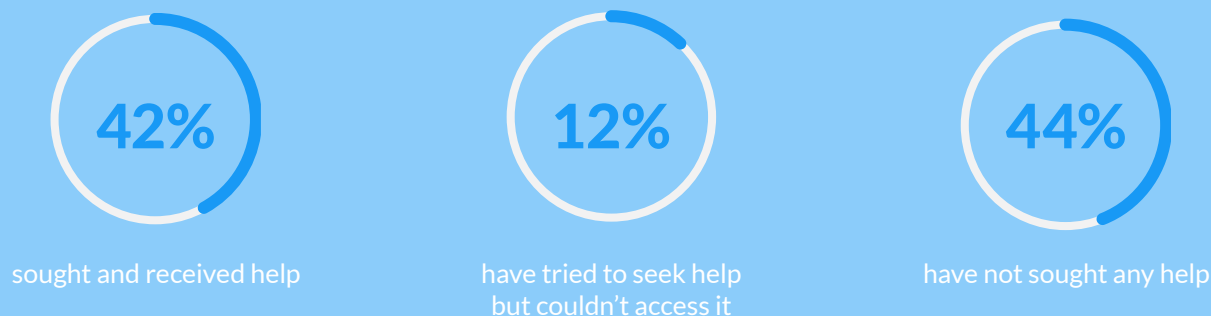
Daniel Rolton, Consultant Spinal Surgeon:

Many people delay seeking help for back pain because they've been told in the past that it's simply something they have to live with, or that little can be done to improve it. Back pain is incredibly common, and in many cases it settles with simple measures such as staying active, gentle exercise and appropriate pain relief. As a result, people often normalise recurring symptoms and assume they are not serious enough to seek advice.

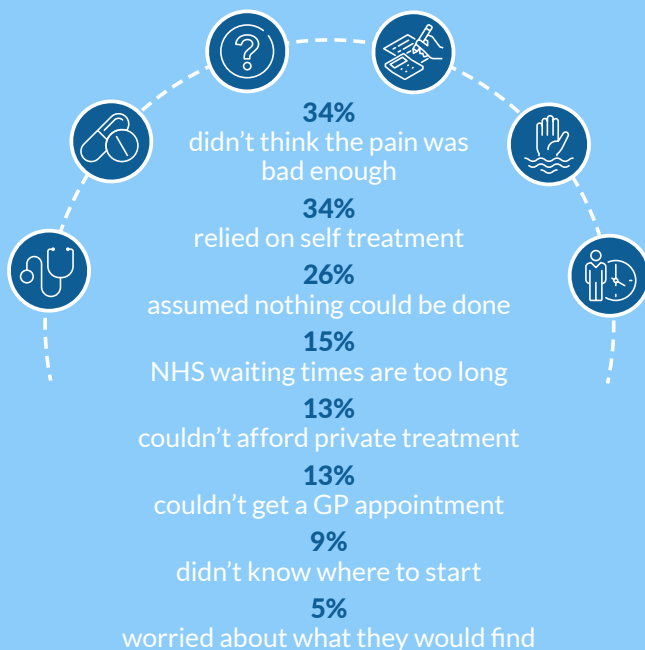
However, back pain is not a single condition. There are many different causes, and these are often grouped under the broad term 'back pain'. If symptoms are becoming more severe, lasting longer than expected, or are affecting sleep, mobility, work or daily activities despite self-management, it is sensible to seek professional assessment.



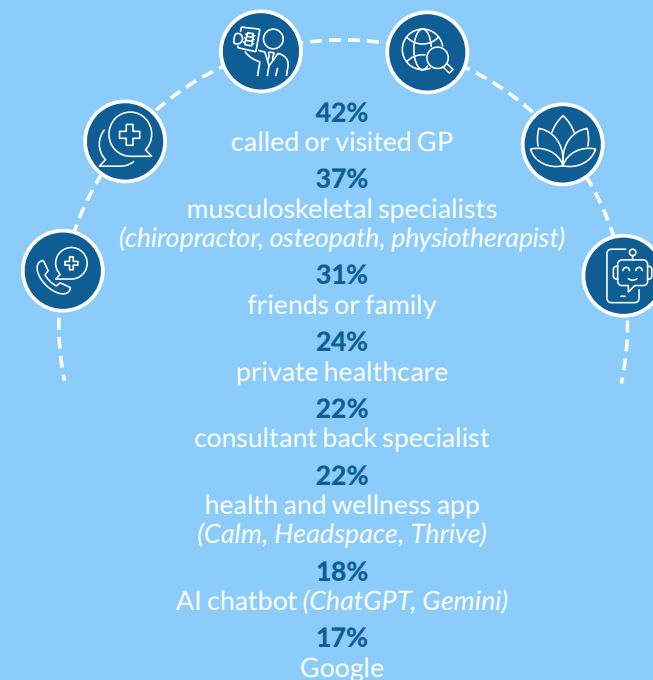
Those who have experienced recurring or persistent back pain in the last 12 months



Reasons for not seeking help



For those who did seek help



Final thoughts



**Deborah
Alsina MBE,
Chief Executive
of Arthritis UK:**

This report highlights that there are already too many people struggling with the side

effects of back pain, and at Arthritis UK we sadly know all too well how devastating these factors can be. Discussing the wider impact of pain is a great place to start, as it can help to broaden people's understanding and reduce a sense of invisibility and isolation we so often hear about.

We need to become more comfortable talking about the effects of musculoskeletal pain to challenge society's misconceptions and make sure people are able to access the care and support they so desperately need. If someone is finding that pain is regularly affecting mood, sleep, confidence, relationships, and their ability to manage everyday life, please don't suffer in silence. We're here to help at Arthritis UK.



**Paul Manning,
Chief Executive
Officer at Circle
Health Group:**

As an organisation, Circle Health Group's responsibility is to support the patients

in our care to get the answers, support and treatment they need to live happy and active lives. Our Living with Back Pain Report highlights that backpain is a condition that impacts thousands of individuals, regardless of age, profession or socio-economic position.

Crucially, our research shows that young people are becoming increasingly concerned about how their health in the present will impact their life in the future. Sadly, it appears that there is still a reluctance or fear associated with seeking professional support for conditions like backpain. The onus is on us all, as healthcare providers, to change that stigma and provide our patients with the confidence to discuss their health more openly.

This is a commitment that I, as Chief Executive Officer of Circle Health Group and an orthopaedic surgeon, make and will continue to advocate for across the healthcare sector in the UK. Together, we can make an enormous difference to lives of those suffering with backpain. Those suffering with conditions should no longer feel as though their pain must be endured or experienced in silence.

My thanks to our partners, specialists, Arthritis UK and colleagues who have helped us to shed an important light on the plight of those suffering with backpain across the UK.



