Acute Thoracic Spine Pain

Acute Thoracic Pain is pain felt in the upper back (often between the shoulder blades) that lasts for a short time (i.e. less than three months).
In most cases it is not possible to identify the cause of Acute Thoracic Spinal Pain. However, it is not necessary to have a specific diagnosis of the cause to manage the pain effectively. Generally pain will settle down with time and requires minimal treatment. It is rare for pain to be caused by a serious medical problem.

What can I do to help?

Pain relief: Simple painkillers such as paracetamol (analgesics) and ibuprofen (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) can help. You should use them as advised, as and when you need them. Don’t wait until your pain is severe before taking painkillers, as they’re likely to work better if you manage your pain carefully. Don’t use painkillers for more than 2 weeks without seeking medical advice.

If you are currently taking any form of medication it is advisable to consult your GP or pharmacist before taking additional pain relief.

Posture: Try to maintain good posture when sitting at home, or at work or in the car. Staying in awkward positions while working or driving will affect the soft tissues in your back and could increase your pain and make recovery take longer. Try to limit sitting to 20 minutes without a break where possible.

Exercise: Exercise is one of the most effective ways of treating back pain. Research shows that bad rest for more than a couple of days doesn’t help back pain and in the long term actually makes it worse as the muscles in your back become weak. The following exercises are designed to increase the flexibility of your back and strengthen your core stability muscles.

If the pain is not settling down or is getting worse, you may need further assessment.

Range of Movement Exercises:

1. Extension over Chair

Sit on a chair with your arms folded across your chest. Now arch backwards over the back of the chair, raising your elbows up towards the ceiling as you do so.

Hold for 2 seconds before returning to the start position and repeating.
2. Gentle Thoracic Spine Rotations in Sitting

Sit with your hands resting on your thighs.

Slide your left hand towards your left knee, rotating your body to the right as you do so.

Hold for 2 seconds before repeating with the right hand, rotating your body to the left.

3. Thoracic Rotations

Sit with your arms folded across your chest; rotate your shoulders and upper body around to the left, hold for 2 seconds, before repeating to the right.

4. Stretch over Rolled Towel

Roll up a towel into a sausage and place it on the floor. Now place yourself in a laying down position as shown in the picture so that the towel lines along the length of your back between your shoulder blades. Maintain this position for 5-10 minutes.

(Note: You may need a pillow for your head for comfort.) Your knees should be bent and your feet flat on the floor.