

RED FLAGS

To find out whether your neck or back pain may have an underlying medical cause, we go through three questionnaires:

1. Could you have a **fracture, tumour, infection or rheumatological condition** affecting your neck or back?
2. Could you have a **SEVERE disc herniation** causing **neurological deficits**?
3. Could **dysfunction of an internal organ** be causing your neck or back pain?

These questionnaires look for so-called ‘**red flags**’. These are warning signs that may indicate that your neck or back pain requires **urgent medical attention**.

If you answer **YES** to a question marked with a red flag  I recommend that you **SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ADVICE**.

If you answer **YES** to a question marked with a flag with a red outline  it is advisable to **consult with your chiropractor or GP first for a THOROUGH CHECK-UP**, to rule out any underlying pathology.

As for the questions without a flag: answering **YES to only one or two** of these questions does not necessarily mean that your neck or back pain has a pathological cause. However, if you answer **YES to SEVERAL of these questions**, you should once again see a chiropractor or GP for a more thorough assessment before continuing with the Back-Up Plan.



QUESTIONNAIRE 1

RULING OUT A POSSIBLE FRACTURE, TUMOUR, INFECTION OR RHEUMATOLOGICAL CONDITION

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- 💧 Does your pain wake you up at night?
 - 💧 Is the intensity of neck or back pain the same - or even worse - after four chiropractic treatments?
 - 💧 Is the pain constant? Is there no position that eases the pain? ☒
 - 💧 Is the pain getting progressively worse over a short period of time? ☒
 - 💧 Did your neck or back pain start after an accident or fall?
 - 💧 Do you have a history of severe osteoporosis (brittle bones)? ☐
 - 💧 Do you have a history of cancer? ☐
 - 💧 Does cancer run in your family? ☐
 - 💧 Have you recently lost a significant amount of weight without trying? ☐
 - 💧 Have you been extremely tired lately? ☐
 - 💧 Did your neck or back pain start after a medical procedure? ☒
 - 💧 Do you generally feel unwell? ☐
 - 💧 Do you have a fever, chills or night sweats? ☒
 - 💧 Do you have a weakened immune system? ☐
 - 💧 Are your joints extremely stiff in the morning for more than an hour?
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QUESTIONNAIRE 2

RULING OUT A **SEVERE DISC HERNIATION** WITH **NEUROLOGICAL DEFICITS**

- 💧 Do you lack the strength in your feet to stand on your heels?
 - 💧 Do you lack the strength in your feet to stand on your toes?
 - 💧 Do you lack the strength in your hands to lift something or to open a bottle?
 - 💧 Do you suddenly drop things from your hands without realising?
 - 💧 Do you slap your foot down when you walk (aka foot drop)? ☒
 - 💧 Do you drag your foot when walking? Do you trip over your own feet?
 - 💧 Can you only walk a short distance before having to stop because of severe back or leg pain?
 - 💧 Is the pain becoming increasingly severe and unbearable? ☒
 - 💧 Can you no longer sleep at night because of the pain?
 - 💧 Can you trigger the pain by holding your breath and straining?
 - 💧 Have you had severe neck or back pain for more than eight weeks?
 - 💧 Can you no longer control your bladder or bowel movements? ☒
 - 💧 Are you unable to empty your bladder properly? ☒
 - 💧 Are you experiencing erectile dysfunction?
 - 💧 Do you have a numb area around your buttocks, genital area and/or the inner thighs? ☒
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QUESTIONNAIRE 3

RULING OUT ORGAN DYSFUNCTION

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- 💧 Are you short of breath? ☐
 - 💧 Do you have high blood pressure? ☐
 - 💧 Do you sometimes experience a feeling of tightness or pressure in your chest? ☐
 - 💧 Does one foot feel much colder than the other? ☐
 - 💧 Do you have oedema (fluid retention) in your legs? Does the imprint of your socks remain visible on your legs? ☐
 - 💧 Do you have diabetes? ☐
 - 💧 Do you have abdominal pain? Is your abdominal pain linked to your back pain? ☐
 - 💧 Do you experience a burning sensation when urinating? ☐
 - 💧 Do you drink very little? ☐
 - 💧 Is there blood in your urine? ☒
 - 💧 Have you noticed a change in your menstrual cycle? ☐
 - 💧 Do you experience bleeding between periods? ☐
 - 💧 Is there blood in your stool? ☐
 - 💧 Is the pain so severe that you find yourself crawling across the floor? ☒
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PLEASE NOTE!

These questions are **not exhaustive**.

It would be convenient if pathological neck and back pain could be identified using a simple yes-or-no questionnaire. But **medicine is not mathematics**, and the rules are not black and white.

An early-stage tumour, for example, can be very subtle and cause hardly any symptoms. At the same time, functional neck or back pain can sometimes present in such an unusual way that it may appear as though something more serious is going on.

If you are unsure whether or not your neck or back pain is harmless, please consult your chiropractor or GP!