

When to Seek Further Help

Recognising Red Flags and Knowing Your Next Steps

1 Most Symptoms Are Not Emergencies

The vast majority of pain and discomfort during rehabilitation is a normal part of recovery — it does not require emergency care. Soreness, stiffness, and temporary increases in pain are common and expected as your body adapts.

However, some symptoms do require prompt attention. Knowing the difference between normal recovery discomfort and a genuine warning sign reduces both unnecessary anxiety and delay in getting help when it truly matters.

Trust your instincts. If something feels different, sudden, or seriously wrong — seek help. It is always better to be assessed and reassured than to wait and wonder.

2 Emergency Red Flags — Seek Immediate Help

The symptoms below require calling 999 or going to A&E; immediately. Do not drive yourself — call for help.

Symptom	Why It Is Urgent
Sudden severe chest pain, especially with breathlessness or arm pain	May indicate a cardiac event — do not wait, call 999 immediately
Sudden weakness or numbness in both legs	May indicate spinal cord compression — this is a medical emergency
Loss of bladder or bowel control (new onset)	Cauda equina syndrome — a surgical emergency requiring immediate assessment
Severe unrelenting pain not relieved by any position or movement	May indicate serious underlying pathology — urgent assessment is needed
Rapidly spreading redness, heat, and swelling with fever	May indicate a severe infection — urgent treatment is required

3 Urgent Symptoms — Contact Your GP or Clinician Soon

The symptoms below are not emergencies, but they should be assessed within 24–48 hours. Contact your GP or treating clinician rather than waiting for your next scheduled appointment.

Symptom	What It May Indicate	Action
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Significant swelling after minor activity	Possible joint effusion or acute injury	Contact your clinician; reduce activity in the meantime
New severe night pain that wakes you from sleep	Pain at rest can indicate a non-mechanical cause	GP assessment recommended
Unexplained weight loss alongside musculoskeletal symptoms	A systemic cause should be excluded	GP assessment recommended
Skin breakdown, ulceration, or a non-healing wound (especially in diabetes)	Infection risk; may require wound care	Contact your clinician or GP promptly
Significant worsening of symptoms without a clear cause	Reassessment of your rehabilitation plan may be needed	Contact your treating clinician

4 When to Contact Your Rehab Clinician

Not every concern requires an emergency response. The situations below are best handled by contacting your rehabilitation team directly — they are there to help you navigate these moments.

Situation	What to Do
Symptoms significantly worse after an exercise session	Report at your next appointment; reduce load in the meantime and monitor
New symptoms not previously discussed with your clinician	Contact the clinic for advice before your next scheduled appointment
Orthotics causing persistent pressure marks or skin changes	Do not continue wearing them; contact the clinic for an adjustment
You are unsure whether a symptom is a normal part of recovery	Always better to ask — your clinician would rather you contact them than worry

5 Key Takeaways

KEY TAKEAWAY 1

Most discomfort in recovery is normal — but you are not expected to ignore everything. Soreness, stiffness, and mild pain during rehabilitation are usually part of the healing process. Knowing which symptoms are expected helps you stay calm and keep progressing. This resource is here to help you tell the difference — not to alarm you, but to empower you.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2

Act promptly on red flags — earlier is always better. Emergency symptoms should never be waited out. Conditions like cauda equina syndrome or a cardiac event improve with faster treatment. When in doubt about an emergency symptom, call 999. For urgent but non-emergency concerns, contacting your GP within 24–48 hours is the right step.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3

Your rehab team is your first point of contact for anything in between. You do not need to decide everything on your own. If a symptom is new, worsening, or just feels different — contact your clinician. They would far rather reassure you than find out later that a concern was left unaddressed. Reaching out is always the right call.