



Synergis

Spine | Sports | Performance

TRADIES NATIONAL HEALTH MONTH • AUGUST 2026

THE TRADIE BACK PLAYBOOK

What actually helps a sore back, what makes it worse, and the short list of symptoms that mean stop reading and get seen today.

68%

of Australian tradies report pain in
their back, neck or shoulders

10%

see a physio to prevent
work-related pain or injury

Source: Australian Physiotherapy Association, Tradies National Health Month, 2026.

FREE RESOURCE • KEEP IT IN THE UTE

synergis.au • 1300 60 50 81 • @synergis.health

Why your back actually hurts

Most low back pain is what clinicians call non-specific. That's not a cop-out — it means there's no single disc, nerve or fracture to point at. The pain comes from load, fatigue, sensitivity and movement habits that have stacked up over years. Good news: that's usually modifiable. Bad news: there's nothing on a scan to blame.

1 Load that outran capacity

A big week, an unusual job, an apprentice who isn't pulling their weight yet. The tissue didn't fail because it's weak in absolute terms. It failed because demand outran what it had been prepared for.

2 Positions held too long

Kneeling in a roof cavity. Overhead work. And the sleeper: two hours a day in a ute seat is a two-hour lumbar flexion hold, five days a week, for twenty years.

3 Everything that isn't the back

Sleep under six hours. Chronic stress. Deconditioning. Weight that crept on since the footy stopped. These aren't lifestyle lectures — they measurably change how much a given load hurts.

Five things you've been told that aren't true

“Rest it until it settles.”

Bed rest is one of the few things we're genuinely confident makes low back pain worse. Movement within tolerance is the treatment.

“You need a scan.”

Scan a hundred pain-free 40-year-olds and a large share show disc bulges. Early imaging in a straightforward episode tends to find things that were already there — and make you scared of them.

“Bending your back is dangerous.”

Your back is built to bend. The problem is almost never the shape you lifted in — it's that the load outran what you'd prepared for.

“Hurting means I'm damaging it.”

Pain is a protective output, not a damage readout. A sore back you keep gently loading usually settles faster than one you wrap in cotton wool.

“I'll take time off until it's right.”

Prolonged time off is one of the strongest predictors of a short episode becoming a long one. Reduced duties beat no duties, almost always.

The 5-minute ute reset

Four moves. No gear. Do them in the driveway before you get in — not after you get out. You're preparing the body for the position, not repairing it afterwards.

1

Extend over the tray

10 reps, slow

Stand square at the tray edge, hands on it, feet under hips. Push the hips forward and let the lower back extend over the top. Chest up, chin neutral. Two seconds at the end, then release. This should feel like relief, not a pinch.

2

Half-kneel, drive tall

30 seconds each side

One knee down, back foot flat, hand on the tow bar for balance. Squeeze the back glute and push the hip forward. If you feel it in your lower back you've arched instead of moving the hip — tuck the tailbone under first, then drive.

3

Open the book

8 each side

Stand side-on to the open ute door, one hand on the frame. Rotate the chest away and let your eyes follow the hand all the way around. Rotation comes from the mid-back, not the waist. If you only do one of these four, make it this one.

4

Groove the hinge

10 reps

Stand tall, hands on the front of your hips. Push the hips straight back, knees soft, chest long. Go until the hamstrings load, then drive the hips forward to stand. The point is making the hips do their share so the back isn't doing all of it.

HOW MUCH PAIN IS OK



GREEN — keep going

Up to about 3/10, settles within an hour, no worse next morning.

→ Continue as you are.



AMBER — modify

4–5/10, or morning stiffness that eases within 30 minutes.

→ Halve the range or the reps. Don't stop.



RED — get it looked at

Above 6/10, pain lingering past 24 hours, or anything shooting down a leg.

→ Stop the movement and book an assessment.

When to stop reading and get seen

Most back pain is unremarkable. A small number of presentations are not — and these are the reason a proper assessment beats a guess from someone on site.

● Today. Emergency department.

- Numbness in the saddle region (the area that contacts a bike seat)
- Any change in bladder or bowel control
- Progressive weakness in a leg or foot

● Promptly. GP or physiotherapist.

- Unexplained weight loss, fever, or night pain that won't settle in any position
- Back pain that started after a serious fall or significant impact

● Worth mentioning — it changes the assessment.

- A history of cancer, or long-term corticosteroid use, with new back pain

THE FIVE THINGS THAT ACTUALLY WORK

- 1 Keep moving. Movement within tolerance beats rest, every time.
- 2 Stay at work if you can, even on modified duties.
- 3 Load it, don't just stretch it. Stretching feels good for twenty minutes; strength changes what you can tolerate in six months.
- 4 Sleep and stress are treatment, not background noise — they measurably change pain thresholds.
- 5 Get an actual diagnosis, not a group opinion from a job site in 2022.

THE TRADE BODY SERVICE • AUGUST ONLY

Osteo inspection & service. Written logbook.

A full assessment with objective VALD strength and asymmetry testing, a appointment within 14 days, and a written report with a plan that takes under ten minutes a day. \$199, both consultations included. Claimable on private health extras as two separate sessions. Limited to 10 places, ends 31 August 2026.

synergis.au • 1300 60 50 81 • info@synergis.au

This resource is general information only and is not a substitute for individual clinical assessment. Individual results vary; suitability for any program is determined at your initial consultation. Synergis Health — musculoskeletal and sports physiotherapy and osteopathy, Maddingley, Bacchus Marsh.