

# back<sup>2</sup>

S1 W1

noun [countable]

**1** BODY **part of your body**

**a) sports**

the part of the body between the neck and legs, on the opposite side to the stomach and chest:

*The cat arched its back and hissed.*

*My feet were sore and my back was aching.*

*Keep your head up and your back straight.*

*To avoid back problems, always bend your knees when you lift heavy objects.*

*He lay **on** his **back** and gazed at the ceiling.*

*Johnny was lying **flat on** his **back** in the middle of the floor.*

*Anna stood **with** her **back to** the window.*

**on somebody's back** (= carried on someone's back)

*The girl appeared again, now with a little baby on her back.*

**b)**

the bones between your neck and the top of your legs

**SYN** spine

*He broke his back in a motorbike accident.*

**2** PARTBACK OF SOMETHING **not at front** [usually singular] the part of something that is furthest from the front

**OPP**

*a T-shirt with a picture of a snake **on the back***

**back of**

*He kissed her on the back of her head.*

*Her window faced the backs of the houses.*

**in the back (of something)** (= used especially about the back of a vehicle)

*Two men were sitting in the back of the car.*

**at the back (of something)**

*a small shop with an office at the back*

**in back (of something) (AmE)** (= in or at the back of something)

*Kids should always wear seat belts, even in back.*

**out back (AmE)** (= behind a house or other building)

*Tom's working on the car out back.*

**round/out the back (BrE)** (= behind a house or building)

*Have you looked round the back?*

- 3** SURFACEBACK OF SOMETHING **less important side** [usually singular] the less important side or surface of something such as a piece of paper or card

**OPP**

*Paul scribbled his address on the back of an envelope.*

*The credits are listed on the back of the album.*

- 4** CHAIRBACK OF SOMETHING **part of seat** the part of a seat that you lean against when you are sitting:

**back of**

*He rested his arm on the back of the sofa.*

- 5** BOOK/NEWSPAPERBACK OF SOMETHING **book/newspaper** [usually singular] the last pages of a book or newspaper

**OPP**

**at the back (of)**

*The sports pages are usually at the back.*

**in the back (of)**

*The answers are in the back of the book.*

**6 at/in the back of your mind** THINK ABOUT

a thought that is at the back of your mind is one you try to ignore because you do not want it to be true:

*At the back of her mind was the thought that he might be with someone else.*

**put/push something to the back of your mind**

*He tried to push these uncomfortable thoughts to the back of his mind.*

**7 back to back**

**a)** BACK OF SOMETHING

with the backs towards each other:

*Stand back to back and we'll see who's tallest.*

**b)** SERIES

happening immediately one after the other:

*a couple of back-to-back wins for the team*

→ BACK-TO-BACK<sup>1</sup>

**8 back to front** (BrE)

**a)**

in an incorrect position so that what should be at the back is at the front:

*You've got your sweater on back to front.*

**b)**

doing something the wrong way round and starting with the part that should be at the end:

*He got the commands back to front and the program didn't work.*

**9 behind somebody's back** SECRET

if you do something behind someone's back, you do it without them knowing:

*I don't like the idea of the two of them talking about me behind my back.*

*I should have realized that he'd **go behind my back** (= do something without telling me) .*

### **10 when/while somebody's back is turned**

if something happens when your back is turned, it happens when you are not able to see or know what someone is doing:

*What are your kids up to when your back is turned?*

### **11 get/put somebody's back up (BrE) (informal) ANNOY**

to annoy someone:

*Simone was the kind of person who was always putting people's backs up.*

### **12 get (somebody) off somebody's back (spoken) ANNOY**

to stop annoying someone with a lot of questions, criticisms etc, or to make someone stop annoying you in this way:

*Maybe the only way to get him off my back is to tell him the truth.*

*Do me a favour and **get off my back!***

### **13 be on somebody's back (spoken) FORCE SOMEBODY TO DO SOMETHING**

to be trying to make someone do something they do not want to do:

*Why are you and Dad always on my back?*

### **14 on the back of something**

as a result of something that already exists or something you have already done:

*The company should be able to generate business on the back of existing contracts.*

### **15 on the backs of somebody**

using the work of a particular group to achieve something that they will not get any advantage from:

*Economic prosperity was won on the backs of the urban poor.*

**16** FOOTBALL ETC a defending player in a sports team

**SYN** defender

**17 the back of beyond** FAR (informal)

a place that is a long way from other places and is difficult to get to:

*It's a nice little cottage but it really is in the back of beyond.*

**18 be (flat) on your back**

a)  
to be lying on your back – used to emphasize that someone seems unlikely to get up soon:

*He was drunk and flat on his back on the street.*

b)  
to be so ill that you cannot get out of bed:  
*Their best player was flat on his back in hospital.*

c)  
if a business, country, ECONOMY etc is on its back, it is not successful:

*The UK market was flat on its back.*

**19 put your back into it** (informal) WORK HARD

to work extremely hard at something:

*If we really put our backs into it, we could finish today.*

**20 be glad/delighted/pleased etc to see the back of somebody/ something**

to be happy that someone is leaving or because you no longer have to deal with something:

*No, I'm not too upset that he left – in fact, I was glad to see the back of him.*

*I **can't wait to see the back of** this project, I can tell you (= I will be happy when it ends).*

**21 have your back to/against the wall** (informal) DIFFICULT

to be in a difficult situation with no choice about what to do

**22 at your back**

**a)** BEHIND

behind you:

*They had the wind at their backs as they set off.*

**b)**

supporting you:

*Caesar marched into Rome with an army at his back.*

**23 on your back** (informal) (not polite)

if someone achieves something on their back, they achieve it by having sex with someone

**24 high-backed/straight-backed/low-backed etc** BACK OF SOMETHING

with a high, straight, low etc back:

*a high-backed chair*

→ **know something like the back of your hand** AT KNOW<sup>1</sup> (3) ,

→ **turn your back on somebody/something** AT TURN<sup>1</sup> (7)

**Word origin**

**Language:** Old English

**Origin:** *bæc*

*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*

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