

LOW BACK PAIN

What Causes Low Back Pain?

The back is made up of bones (vertebrae) of the spinal column, disks between these bones, the spinal cord (which contains nerves), and muscles and ligaments. Muscle in the back and belly (abdomen) help support the spine. Injury in this area can cause pain. The term low back pain means pain in the lower parts of the spine. An injury of accident such as a fall can cause *acute* low back pain lasting 1 to 7 days. *Chronic* low back pain lasts longer, for more than 3 months. Many such injuries result from twisting or sudden movement. Obesity, poor posture, and weak back and abdominal muscles may also cause this pain. Some people have pain after sitting for a long time or reaching for something too far away. Low back pain may also occur with diseases such as arthritis or fibromyalgia and rarely, in more serious conditions such as tumors, kidney disease and blood disorders.

What Are Other Symptoms of Low Back Pain?

Bending at the waist, lifting, walking, and standing may be hard to do. Pain may disturb nighttime sleep. Chronic pain may affect the ability to do a job. If the sciatic nerve is in the injured area, the pain, called *sciatica*, will travel down the leg.

How Is Low Back Pain Diagnosed?

Diagnoses results from taking a medical history, doing a physical, and x-ray studies or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) may be done if clearer pictures of bones, nerves, disks between the bones, or other areas are needed. A study using electric current, called an electromyogram (EMG), helps diagnose muscle and nerve problems and may be done if pressure on the nerves may be causing numbness or tingling in the legs. The doctor may also order blood test to see whether the pain is caused by another ailment that may have similar symptoms.

How Is Low Back Pain Treated?

Treatment depends on the cause of the pain and how long pain has lasted. If the pain is due to an injury, the doctor may suggest use of cold compresses. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may relieve the pain. Severe pain may require stronger narcotic-containing medicines for a short time. For muscle spasms, a doctor may prescribe a muscle relaxant. All medicines have side effects. NSAIDs may cause stomach upset, ulcers, rash, and kidney or liver problems. Muscle relaxants may bring about drowsiness, dizziness, or rash. Physical therapy may help reduce pain. Chronic low back pain can improve with exercise for the lower back and abdomen.

Disclaimer: All material on this brochure is provided for general information purposes only and should not be considered medical advice or consultation.

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DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Low Back Pain:

- **DO** take your medicine as prescribed.
- **DO** call your doctor if you have drug side effects.
- **DO** lose weight if you're overweight.
- **DO** back stretching and strengthening exercises daily as tolerated.
- **DO** use good posture when sitting, standing, or lifting.
- **DO** call your doctor if you have difficulty urinating or lose control of your bowels or bladder.
- **DON'T** wait for a drug side effect to go away by itself.
- **DON'T** give up. If you do not feel better, ask your doctor about starting in a special treatment program.
- **DON'T** completely stop exercising.

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