



Back Pain

MU Patient Education Series

Definition:

Back pain is a common condition in which you experience pain in the lower or upper areas of your back. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and can be controlled and even prevented through the use of a variety of techniques. With the proper care and treatment, your pain can be managed and you will be back on your feet.

CAUSES:

Your back is a highly specialized, highly important part of your body. It is made up of bones, muscles, tendons, disks and ligaments. Back pain can occur from issues with any of these parts. Sometimes the cause of back pain is unknown, but other times it can be caused by any of the following problems:

- Strained muscles and or ligaments
- Heavy and /or improper lifting
- Quick, unexpected movement
- Muscle spasms
- Arthritis (joint disorders)
- Irregular bone shape/positioning/curving
- Compression fractures on your spine
- Spinal infection
- Spinal cancer
- Herniated disk
- Degenerative changes
- Osteoporosis

WHO IS AT HIGH RISK FOR ACQUIRING BACK PAIN?

Though back pain does not have a single cause, there are several factors that may make you more susceptible to the pain. Some of these factors include:

- Depression and or anxiety
- Heavy and awkward lifting



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- Stress at home or at work
- Physically laborious work
- Sedentary work
- Sex (females are more likely to acquire back pain)
- Age (the older you are, the more susceptible you become to back pain)
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Injury

If you try to limit some of these risk factors, not only will you be lessening your chance of acquiring back pain, but you will be on the right track for a healthy lifestyle!

SIGNS/SYMPTOMS:

- Aching muscles
- Excruciating pain
- Failure to stand up straight
- Limited flexibility in your back
- Narrowed range of motion
- Pain that radiates down your leg

DIAGNOSIS/TESTS:

If your back pain turns severe enough that it interferes with your daily life and causes pain and discomfort, make an appointment to see your healthcare professional. While you wait to see your physician, try to relax. Over the counter pain relievers may be beneficial under the advice of your physician. When you see your physician, he or she will ask you many questions to figure out the root of your back problems. Be as honest as you can to get the best possible treatment.

Usually, back pain is tested through a standard physical examination. Your physician will examine your back and evaluate its movement and range of motion and observe how you walk, stand, sit and lift. From this, your physician will learn the place your pain is coming from. In most cases, further diagnostic tests are not necessary but in some cases your physician may order blood and urine tests, X-rays, MRIs, CT or bone scans. These diagnostic tests are usually used when a more detailed assessment is required.

TREATMENT/CARE:

Back pain can usually be treated with a few days of rest and some over-the-counter pain medications. If this does not work, your physician may suggest some stronger medications such as small doses of antidepressants, muscle relaxers or narcotics. Physical therapy and monitored exercise may improve your condition as well. Your doctor may also give you cortisone injections.



These are anti-inflammatory medications that reduce the pain and decrease swelling around your nerves. Though rare, surgery may be performed if necessary. In addition to more conventional treatment methods, alternative medicine is occasionally used. Methods such as herbal treatments, yoga, acupuncture, massages and chiropractic therapy can be utilized to relieve back pain. It is important to mention that regardless of the treatment plan you choose, you must follow it properly and exactly in order to achieve the best results.

PREVENTION:

Your back is an important body part, and it is crucial to keep it strong and healthy. To avoid back pain and other back-related issues, there are a number of different prevention techniques:

- Maintaining a healthy diet
- Maintaining a healthy weight—avoid being overweight or obese
- Stop smoking
- Regular exercise
- Standing and sitting properly with good posture
- Avoid excessive heavy lifting—and if you are lifting, lift properly by not putting all the weight and pressure on your back

CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF:

If treated and cared for properly, your back pain should cease and you should be able to return to your normal activities with little to no pain. If your pain does not subside, call your doctor to help you find a better treatment plan. If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms along with your back pain, be sure to contact your healthcare provider immediately:

- Persistent, severe pain
- Unexplained weight loss
- Throbbing pain in your abdomen
- Fever
- Bladder or bowel problems
- Weakness or lack of sensation in your legs

The sooner you contact your doctor, the sooner you will be cared for and on the road to recovery!

DISCLAIMER:

Medline does not practice medicine, and no information presented on this website is medical advice or intended as a substitute for the advice of a physician.