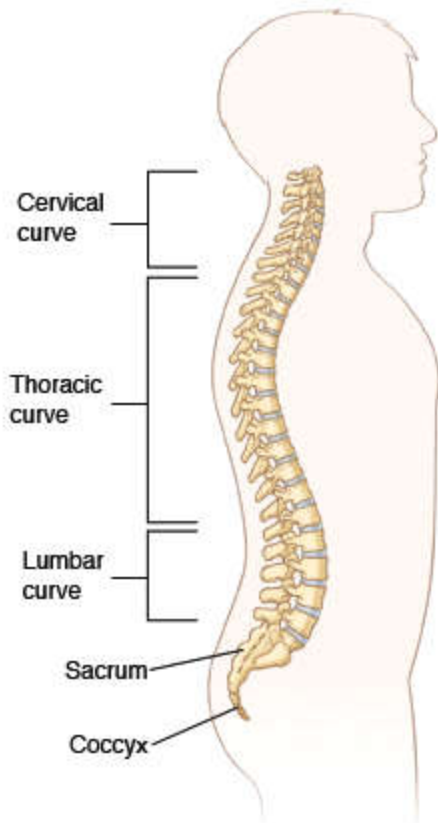


## Back Pain (Acute or Chronic)



Back pain is one of the most common problems. The good news is that most people feel better in 1 to 2 weeks, and most of the rest in 1 to 2 months. Most people can remain active.

People who have pain describe it differently—not everyone is the same.

- The pain can be sharp, stabbing, shooting, aching, cramping or burning.
- Movement, standing, bending, lifting, sitting, or walking may worsen pain.
- It can be localized to one spot or area, or it can be more generalized.
- It can spread or radiate upwards, to the front, or go down your arms or legs (sciatica).
- It can cause muscle spasm.

Most of the time, mechanical problems with the muscles or spine cause the pain. Mechanical problems are usually caused by an injury to the muscles or ligaments. While illness can cause back pain, it is usually not caused by a serious illness. Mechanical problems include:

- Physical activity such as sports, exercise, work, or normal activity

- Overexertion, lifting, pushing, pulling incorrectly or too aggressively
- Sudden twisting, bending, or stretching from an accident, or accidental movement
- Poor posture
- Stretching or moving wrong, without noticing pain at the time
- Poor coordination, lack of regular exercise (check with your doctor about this)
- Spinal disc disease or arthritis
- Stress

Pain can also be related to pregnancy, or illness like appendicitis, bladder or kidney infections, pelvic infections, and many other things.

Acute back pain usually gets better in 1 to 2 weeks. Back pain related to disk disease, arthritis in the spinal joints or spinal stenosis (narrowing of the spinal canal) can become chronic and last for months or years.

Unless you had a physical injury (for example, a car accident or fall) X-rays are usually not needed for the initial evaluation of back pain. If pain continues and does not respond to medical treatment, X-rays and other tests may be needed.

## Home care

Try these home care recommendations:

- When in bed, try to find a position of comfort. A firm mattress is best. Try lying flat on your back with pillows under your knees. You can also try lying on your side with your knees bent up towards your chest and a pillow between your knees.
- At first, do not try to stretch out the sore spots. If there is a strain, it is not like the good soreness you get after exercising without an injury. In this case, stretching may make it worse.
- Don't sit for long periods, as in a long car ride or during other travel. This puts more stress on the lower back than standing or walking.
- During the first 24 to 72 hours after an acute injury or flare up of chronic back pain, apply an ice pack to the painful area for 20 minutes and then remove it for 20 minutes. Do this over a period of 60 to 90 minutes or several times a day. This will reduce swelling and pain. Wrap the ice pack in a thin towel or plastic to protect your skin.
- You can start with ice, then switch to heat. Heat (hot shower, hot bath, or heating pad) reduces pain and works well for muscle spasms. Heat can be applied to the painful area for 20 minutes then remove it for 20 minutes. Do this over a period of 60 to 90 minutes or several times a day. Do not sleep on a

heating pad. It can lead to skin burns or tissue damage.

- You can alternate ice and heat therapy. Talk with your doctor about the best treatment for your back pain.
- Therapeutic massage can help relax the back muscles without stretching them.
- Be aware of safe lifting methods and do not lift anything without stretching first.

## **Medicines**

Talk to your doctor before using medicine, especially if you have other medical problems or are taking other medicines.

- You may use over-the-counter medicine as directed on the bottle to control pain, unless another pain medicine was prescribed. If you have chronic conditions like diabetes, liver or kidney disease, stomach ulcers, or gastrointestinal bleeding, or are taking blood thinners, talk to your doctor before taking any medicine.
- Be careful if you are given a prescription medicines, narcotics, or medicine for muscle spasms. They can cause drowsiness, affect your coordination, reflexes, and judgement. Do not drive or operate heavy machinery.

## **Follow-up care**

Follow up with your healthcare provider, or as advised.

A radiologist will review any X-rays that were taken. Your provide will notify you of any new findings that may affect your care.

## **Call 911**

Call 911 if any of the following occur:

- Trouble breathing
- Confusion
- Very drowsy or trouble awakening
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Rapid or very slow heart rate
- Loss of bowel or bladder control

## **When to seek medical advice**

Call your healthcare provider right away if any of these occur:

- Pain becomes worse or spreads to your legs
- Weakness or numbness in one or both legs
- Numbness in the groin or genital area

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