



Points To Remember About Back Pain

- Back pain may feel like a dull, constant ache or a sudden, sharp pain.
- Your back may hurt in one specific part, or pain may spread all over your back.
- Many different things may cause back pain, such as physical problems with the back or other medical conditions.
- To find the cause of your back pain, doctors may take your medical and family history, do a physical exam, and order any needed tests.
- Doctors treat back pain in several ways, such as medications, other treatments, and surgery.
- You may be able to prevent back pain caused by overuse or moving the wrong way.
- Living with back pain can be hard; however, most people find relief within 6 weeks.

What is back pain?

Back pain is one of the most common medical problems in the United States. It might feel like a dull, constant ache or a sudden, sharp pain. Back pain can result from:

- An accident.
- A fall.
- Lifting something heavy.
- Changes that happen in the spine as you age.
- A disorder or medical condition.

Treatment depends on the cause and symptoms of your pain. You can do things to improve your health and lower your chance of developing chronic (long-lasting) back pain.

Who gets back pain?

Anyone can have back pain. You may be more likely to have back pain because of the following:

- **Fitness level:** Back pain is more common among people who are out of shape. You may also get back pain if you exercise too hard after not being active for a while.

- **Obesity:** If you are overweight or obese, it can put stress on the back and cause pain.
- **Job-related risk factors:** Jobs that require heavy lifting, pushing, pulling, or twisting can injure the back. A desk job may also play a role, especially if you slouch or sit all day in an uncomfortable chair.
- **Age:** You may have more back pain as you get older, particularly after you turn 45.
- **Family history:** Your genes play a role in some disorders that cause back pain.

What are the types of back pain?

You may feel back pain that happens suddenly and lasts a few days to a few weeks, or you may have back pain that lasts longer, such as 4 to 12 weeks or more.

What are the symptoms of back pain?

Your back may hurt in one specific part or it may spread all over your back. It also can cause pain in other areas, such as the:

- Buttocks.
- Legs.
- Abdomen.

Depending on the type, cause, and location, your back pain may get worse when:

- Lifting and bending.
- Resting.
- Sitting.
- Standing.

It may come and go. You also may feel stiffness in the morning when you wake up, and the pain may get better as you move around.

You should see a doctor if your pain does not get better after a few weeks or if any of the following symptoms happen with your back pain:

- Numbness and tingling.
- Very bad back pain that does not get better with medication (see Treatment section).
- Back pain after a fall or injury.
- Back pain along with:
 - Trouble urinating.
 - Weakness, pain, or numbness in your legs.
 - Fever.

- Weight loss that you did not intend.

What causes back pain?

Many different things may cause back pain, such as physical problems with the back. For example:

- [Sprain](#).
- [Strain](#).
- Herniated or “slipped” disc.
- Broken bones.

Other medical conditions can cause back pain, including:

- [Arthritis](#).
- [Osteoporosis](#).
- Kidney stones or infections.
- Tumors.

How is back pain diagnosed?

Doctors use many tools to help figure out the possible cause for your back pain, which helps them know how best to treat it.

Your doctor may ask questions about your medical and family history to see if an injury or other medical condition is the source for the back pain. The doctor may ask many questions about your pain, such as:

- When it started.
- Where it hurts most.
- If anything makes it worse or better.

Your doctor may also do a physical exam and have you bend or lift your legs to see how moving affects the pain, and test your reflexes and muscle strength.

Sometimes, you may need more tests such as:

- X-rays.
- Other imaging tests.
- Bone scans.
- Blood tests.

How is back pain treated?

Doctors treat back pain with medications, other treatments, and surgery. Medications may help relieve pain or help tense muscles relax.

In addition, your doctor may tell you to:

- Use cold packs to help lower some back pain and hot packs to increase blood flow and help you heal.
- Limit activities or exercise that cause pain or make it worse, but do not lay down all day. Slowly increase physical activity as you can.
- Get physical therapy to help strengthen the muscles that support the back.
- Move your body the right way when going about your day, especially when you lift, push, or pull something.
- Practice healthy habits such as exercising, getting regular sleep, eating a healthy diet, and quitting smoking.

Your doctor may recommend surgery if all other treatments tried have not lowered your back pain. However, surgery is not right for everyone, and your doctor will help you decide if it may be best for you.

Who treats back pain?

Different types of health care providers treat back pain, depending on the cause:

- Pain specialists, who have training in diagnosing and treating different types of pain.
- Family or primary care doctors.
- Orthopaedists, who treat and perform surgery for bone and joint diseases.
- Neurologists, who treat disorders and diseases of the spine, brain, and nerves.
- Neurosurgeons, who perform surgery for disorders and diseases of spine, brain, and nerves.
- Rheumatologists, who specialize in treating musculoskeletal diseases and autoimmune disorders.
- Physical therapists, who specialize in movement and strengthening muscles.

Living with back pain

Living with back pain can be hard; however, most people feel better within 6 weeks. Remember to follow your doctor's directions. These tips may make it easier for you to manage your pain and recover:

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Add exercises slowly and talk to your doctor about the types of exercises that are best for you or those that you should not do.

- When sitting for a long time, get up, move around, and switch positions frequently.
- Wear shoes that feel good and that have a low heel.
- When driving a long way, try using support behind your back, and stop frequently to stand up and walk around.
- Sleep on your side, and place a small pillow between your knees. If you tend to sleep on your back, place a pillow under your knees. If possible, try to avoid sleeping on your stomach.
- Limit the amount you carry. Instead, make a few extra trips to avoid carrying too much weight.

Can I prevent it?

Can I prevent back pain?

You may be able to prevent back pain that happens because of overuse or moving the wrong way. The following tips may help:

- Get regular exercise that keeps your back muscles strong. Exercises that increase balance and strength can lower your risk of falling and injuring your back or breaking bones. Your doctor may recommend that you try tai chi or yoga.
- Eat a healthy diet with enough calcium and vitamin D, which help keep your spine strong.
- Maintain a healthy weight to avoid stress and strain on your back.
- Sit up straight. Try to support your back when sitting or standing.
- If you have to lift something heavy, use your leg and stomach muscles, not your back.

For more info

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