



What you need to know about back pain

If you're experiencing back pain, you're not alone. In fact, it's one of the most common medical problems in the U.S.¹ Back pain is different for everyone, but knowing how to prevent it — and when it's time to call a doctor — can help you protect your health and stay feeling your best.

What causes back pain?

Back pain might come on suddenly from an injury, like a fall or lifting something too heavy. Spine or back problems that aren't from an injury, but caused by some diseases, infections, or inflammation, can also cause back pain. Depending on what causes it, back pain might feel like a dull ache or a sharp, stabbing pain.

Back pain risk factors

Anyone can experience back pain, but some factors increase your chances of it, including:

- **Age.** Back pain is more common with age, especially after you turn 45.
- **Lack of exercise.** Weak back and stomach muscles often aren't strong enough to properly support the spine.
- **Weight gain.** Excess body weight puts extra stress on your back and joints.
- **Job-related risks.** Some physical jobs that require heavy lifting, twisting, or pulling make you more likely to injure your back. Desk jobs can also cause problems if you have poor posture or use a chair that doesn't offer enough support.
- **Family history.** Certain genetic problems, such as degenerative disc conditions, can cause back pain.



How to protect your back

There are several ways you can keep your back strong and lower your chance of back injuries:



Work out. Low-impact exercises that don't strain your back, like walking, yoga, and swimming, help increase your strength and endurance and keep your back muscles strong.



Eat a healthy diet. Foods rich in calcium and vitamin D help strengthen your spine. A healthy diet also helps keep weight in check.



Practice healthy back habits. Good posture reduces the stress on your back muscles, so try to stand and sit up straight. Avoid lifting heavy objects, but if you must, let your leg muscles do the work and bend at the knees.



Quit smoking. Smokers are nearly three times as likely to suffer from back pain as non-smokers.² That's because smoking prevents blood from flowing normally to bones and tissues, which can damage the spine. Smoking also makes it harder for your body to heal naturally.

Know when it's time to call your doctor

Back pain will often go away on its own, but not always. Contact your doctor if your back pain:

- Lasts longer than a few weeks.
- Starts after an injury, like a fall or blow to your back.
- Accompanies a fever, numbness and tingling, unintended weight loss, or problems going to the bathroom.
- Spreads down to your legs.

If you have back pain and need help finding a doctor, use the **Find Care & Cost** feature in the SydneySM Health app or at [anthem.com](https://www.anthem.com).

¹ National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases: *Back Pain* (accessed July 2022): [niams.nih.gov](https://www.niams.nih.gov).
² National Library of Medicine: *The association between smoking and low back pain: a meta-analysis* (accessed July 2022): pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.

Mayo Clinic: *Back Pain* (accessed July 2022): [mayoclinic.org](https://www.mayoclinic.org).

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