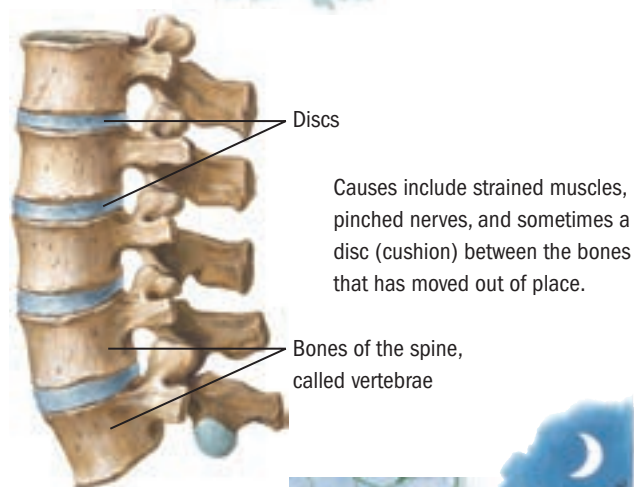


# MANAGING YOUR BACK PAIN



Pain, tenderness, and stiffness in the lower back are the most common symptoms. Symptoms may get better after sleep.



Most people don't need any tests beyond a health care provider's examination, but your health care provider may do x-rays if needed.

## What Is Back Pain?

Back pain refers to pain along or near the spine. Most adults have had back pain at some time. Back pain is usually not serious and often goes away in 1 to 8 weeks, usually less than 1 month.

## What Causes Back Pain?

Causes include strained muscles, pinched nerves, and sometimes a disc moving out of place. Discs are cushions between bones of the spine (vertebrae).

Older people may have back pain because of arthritis in joints in the spine. Older women can have weak bones, from osteoporosis, that can develop cracks.

Sometimes pain or disease in another part of the body, such as the hip, causes back pain.

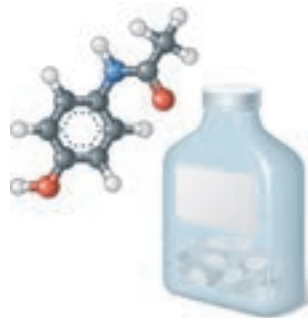
Very few people have serious illnesses (cancer, infection).

## What Are the Symptoms of Back Pain?

The most common symptoms are pain and stiffness of the lower back. Certain areas may feel tender. Pain often gets better at night or while resting. Symptoms of pinched nerves are pain going down into the back of the leg (called sciatica), numbness and tingling of the leg, weakness when moving, and pain that worsens while walking or exercising.

## How Is Back Pain Diagnosed?

Most people don't need any tests beyond a health care provider's examination. The health care provider may do x-rays if pain might be due to spinal deformity or medical illness, or if it is long-term.



Most back pain just needs pain medicine (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen). Physical therapy may also help. Most people are well within 8 weeks, no matter what treatment they receive.



Exercise daily



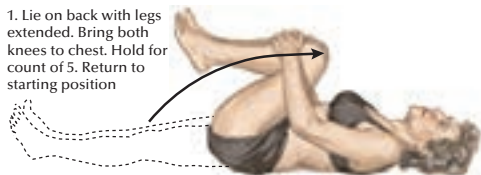
Maintain a healthy weight



Don't lift or push any heavy objects unless you know how to do so safely.

Do back exercises to strengthen the back.

1. Lie on back with legs extended. Bring both knees to chest. Hold for count of 5. Return to starting position



Do each exercise 5 times at first and gradually work up to 20 times as strength increases

2. Lie on back with one leg drawn to chest. Straighten opposite leg firmly to flatten back of knee against floor. Repeat with other leg



## FROM THE DESK OF

## NOTES

## How Is Back Pain Treated?

Most back pain just needs pain medicine (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen). Physical therapy may help if pain resulted from lifting or pushing done the wrong way. Most people are well within 8 weeks, no matter what treatment they receive. People with long-term pain may need to go to a pain clinic. Surgery and other treatments are needed only rarely.

Take steps for back health: strengthen the back by exercising, quit smoking, keep to a normal weight, learn how to properly move and lift things, and reduce stress.

## DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Back Pain:

- ✓ **DO** take pain medicine if needed.
- ✓ **DO** rest to get past the worst of the pain, and start moving actively after the rest period.
- ✓ **DO** exercise to strengthen your back.
- ✓ **DO** see your health care provider if pain continues, if you develop weakness or numbness in your legs, or if you have trouble urinating or holding your urine or bowels.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if pain is getting worse, especially if you are older than 50, younger than 20, or you've had cancer.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if pain is from major trauma.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if pain is related to fever, chills, or unexplained weight loss.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have severe pain at night or pain travels to your lower belly.
- ✓ **DO** use good posture and avoid lifting heavy weights. Lift correctly: bend your knees, not your back, and avoid jerking.
- ✓ **DO** sleep on your side with the legs drawn up toward your chest. Avoid waterbeds and use a stiff mattress.
- ⊘ **DON'T** rest in bed for more than 48 hours, to avoid blood clots and getting weaker.
- ⊘ **DON'T** lift or push any heavy objects unless you know how to do so safely.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Contact the following sources:

- Spine Health  
Website: <http://www.spine-health.com>
- American College of Rheumatology  
Tel: (404) 633-3777  
Website: <http://www.rheumatology.org>
- Arthritis Foundation  
Tel: (800) 283-7800  
Website: <http://www.arthritis.org>