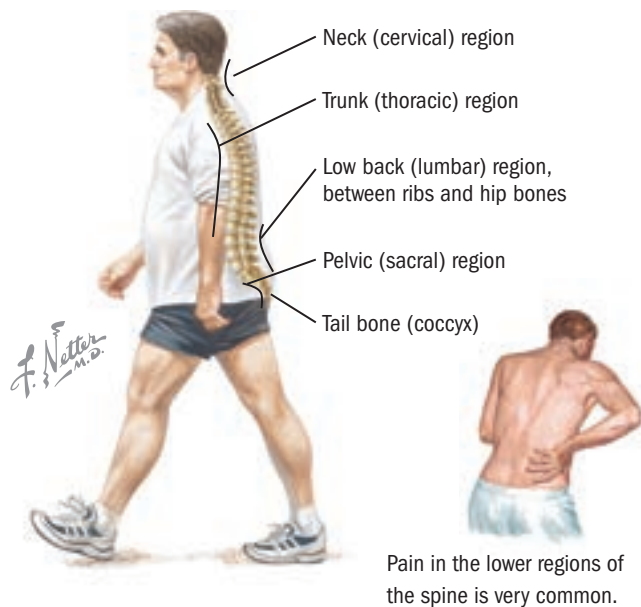
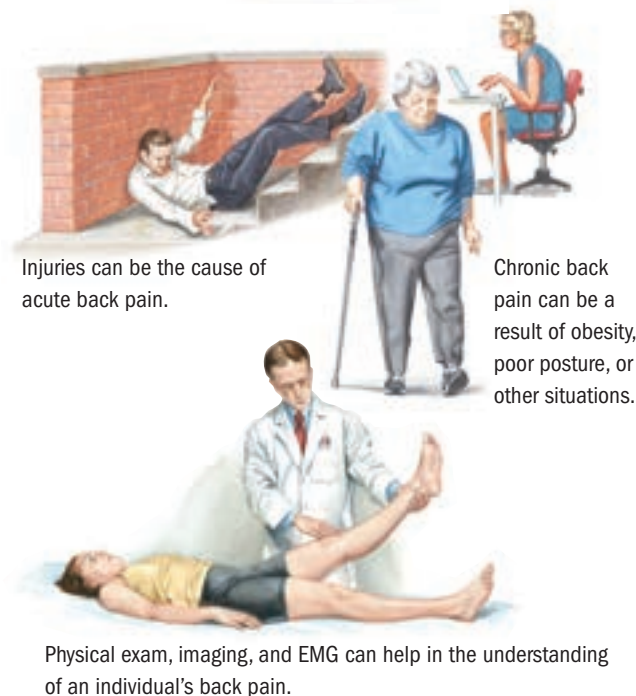
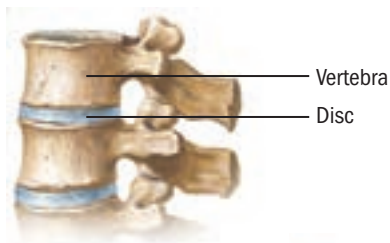


# MANAGING YOUR LOW BACK PAIN



The back is made up of vertebrae, disks, nerves, muscles, and ligaments.



## What Causes Low Back Pain?

The back is made up of bones (vertebrae) of the spinal column, discs between these bones, the spinal cord (which contains nerves), and muscles and ligaments. Muscles in the back and belly (abdomen) help support the spine. Injury in this area can cause pain. The term low back pain means pain in the lower parts of the spine.

An injury or accident such as a fall can cause *acute* low back pain lasting 1 to 7 days. *Chronic* low back pain lasts longer, for more than 3 months. Many such injuries result from twisting or sudden movement. Obesity, poor posture, and weak back and abdominal muscles may also cause this pain. Some people have pain after sitting for a long time or reaching for something too far away.

Low back pain may also occur with diseases such as arthritis or fibromyalgia and rarely, in more serious conditions such as tumors, kidney disease and blood disorders.

## What Are Other Symptoms of Low Back Pain?

Bending at the waist, lifting, walking, and standing may be hard to do. Pain may disturb nighttime sleep. Chronic pain may affect the ability to do a job. If the sciatic nerve is in the injured area, the pain, called *sciatica*, will travel down the leg.

## How Is Low Back Pain Diagnosed?

Your health care provider will make a diagnosis by taking a medical history and doing a physical. X-ray studies or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) may be done if clearer pictures of bones, nerves, discs between the bones, or other areas are needed.

A study using electrical current, called an electromyogram (EMG), helps diagnose muscle and nerve problems and may be done if pressure on the nerves may be causing numbness or tingling in the legs.

The health care provider may in some cases also order blood tests to see whether the pain is caused by another ailment that may have similar symptoms.



Treatment may include taking medicine.

Physical therapy can also reduce pain and strengthen the back.



Exercise daily and control your weight. Ask your health care provider for examples of more exercises you can do on your own.



Stand up straight and walk tall.  
When sitting, keep both feet flat on the floor.  
Always avoid slouching.

## FROM THE DESK OF

## NOTES

## How Is Low Back Pain Treated?

Treatment depends on the cause of the pain and how long pain has lasted.

If the pain is due to an injury, the health care provider may suggest use of cold compresses. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) may relieve the pain. Severe pain may require stronger narcotic-containing medicines for a short time. For muscle spasms, a health care provider may prescribe a muscle relaxant.

All medicines have side effects. NSAIDs may cause stomach upset, ulcers, rash, and kidney or liver problems. Muscle relaxants may bring about drowsiness, dizziness, or rash.

Physical therapy may help reduce pain. Chronic low back pain can improve with exercises for the lower back and abdomen.

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

- ✓ **DO** take your medicine as prescribed.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have drug side effects.
- ✓ **DO** lose weight if you are overweight.
- ✓ **DO** back stretching and strengthening exercises daily.
- ✓ **DO** use good posture when sitting, standing, or lifting.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have difficulty urinating or lose control of your bowels or bladder.
- ⊗ **DON'T** wait for a drug side effect to go away by itself.
- ⊗ **DON'T** give up. If you do not feel better, ask your health care provider about starting in a special treatment program.
- ⊗ **DON'T** completely stop exercising.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### Contact the following sources:

- American Physical Therapy Association  
Tel: (800) 999-2782  
**Website: <http://www.apta.org>**
- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
Tel: (800) 346-AAOS  
**Website: <http://www.aaos.org>**
- American Chronic Pain Association  
Tel: (916) 632-0922  
**Website: <http://www.theacpa.org>**
- North American Spine Society  
Tel: (708) 588-8080  
**Website: <http://www.spine.org>**