

# LOW BACK PAIN



what **you**  
can do



## What is low back pain?

Low back pain is one of the most common health problems. It can affect your daily life and become disabling. However, in most cases low back pain does not indicate a serious problem. For 90% of people the pain will go away by itself within a few days. For the other 10% of people the pain can become worse. So it is important that it is treated as soon as possible.

Your doctor can explain the nature of your particular back problem, what treatment is available and how you can help to improve your back. There are a variety of treatments available and many things you can do to help yourself.

## What can I do about my low back pain?

There are many things you can do to help prevent or reduce the pain.

### **Prevention:**

- stay as active as possible and keep in good shape
- learn what you can do to prevent back strain, such as using correct ways of bending and lifting, sitting on chairs with good back support, sleeping on a firm mattress, wearing comfortable shoes, ensuring your work bench is at a comfortable height, avoiding overweight.

### **If you already have back pain:**

- research has shown that early rehabilitation and prompt return to work and your usual activities are the best ways of getting you back to normal. It doesn't help to overprotect your back, even when it's sore. Too much lying in bed makes it take longer to get better
- ask your doctor about medicine to relieve the pain (check on side effects or interaction with other medicines you may be taking)
- ask about gentle exercises you can do to strengthen your back. Set goals to improve your fitness
- Try to stay positive. Sometimes pain can leave you feeling tired, frustrated, depressed, worried, angry or just generally in a bad mood. In fact it has been shown that this can make the pain feel worse than it actually is. If you are feeling like this you are less likely to want to exercise and get going and it can take longer to get better. So it is important to be aware that pain can sometimes have this effect. Don't allow the pain to take over your life.
- learn to relax. Your muscles get tight and sore if you are stressed.

## Things you can discuss with your doctor:

- What is causing my pain, for example:
  - what I think caused the back problem
  - I'm worried that the pain is a sign of something more serious
  - I'm worried that the back pain won't go away and let me get back to normal
- Whether there are compensation or legal matters related to my back problem
- Whether the pain interferes with my life, for example:
  - the usual activities I do during the day at home, at work, or during leisure time
  - why I don't feel like being active
  - if the pain affects my relations with my family, friends or workmates
- What other treatments I'm having:
  - any medicines or other drugs that I am taking
  - whether I am seeing other doctors or therapists
- Whether there have been any changes in my mood, for example:
  - I have been feeling depressed, worried, angry, or bad about myself
- Each time you go to your doctor for back pain, discuss how it is progressing, what is helping it, and any other advice you need.

## What can my doctor do about low back pain?

Your doctor has guidelines for up to date management of back pain, based on scientific evidence of the most effective and safe treatment. The aim is to treat your back as soon as possible so it doesn't become worse later on. Both you and your doctor need to work together to achieve this.

Initially, the doctor will give you a physical examination, discuss the nature of your problem and then plan your treatment with you

In the past pethidine injections were sometimes given to relieve pain but now research has shown that this should not be used in the treatment of back pain. The reason is that there is a risk of dependence because it is an addictive drug, it can make you feel nauseous, and it only acts for a short time so additional medicine is necessary.

## Remember

If you are actively involved in your health care you will get better results. So:

- ✓ **low back pain is a condition where you must help yourself - the condition may remain painful for some time, but with proper management it should not restrict your lifestyle**
- ✓ **take medicine to relieve the pain only when necessary - avoid constant use of painkillers**
- ✓ **keep doing your usual activities and return to work as soon as possible**
- ✓ **face your fears and stay positive**
- ✓ **be in control - set goals for doing the things that help your back**
- ✓ **learn to relax - be aware of when you are stressed and do something about it**
- ✓ **learn to lift, bend, sit and sleep in ways that support your back**
- ✓ **walk, cycle, swim for 20-30 minutes each day.**



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