



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Pain in the lower back usually caused by muscle strain. It is often accompanied by sciatica (pain that radiates from the back to the buttock and down into the leg). Onset of pain may be immediate or occur some hours after exertion or an injury. The symptoms get into a cycle, starting with a muscle spasm, the spasm then causes pain, and the pain results in additional muscle spasm.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain. It may be continuous, or only occur when you are in a certain position. The pain may be aggravated by coughing or sneezing, bending or twisting.
- Stiffness.

### CAUSES

- Exertion or lifting.
- Severe blow or fall.
- Back disorders.
- Infections.
- Ruptured lumbar disk.
- Nerve dysfunction.
- Osteoporosis.
- Tumors.
- Spondylosis (hardening and stiffening of the spinal column).
- Congenital problem.
- Childbirth.
- Often there is no obvious cause.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Biomechanical risk factors.
- Sedentary occupations.
- Gardening and other yard work.
- Sports and exercise participation, especially if infrequent.
- Obesity.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Exercises to strengthen lower back muscles.
- Learn how to lift heavy objects.
- Sit properly.
- Back support in bed.
- Lose weight, if obese.
- Choose proper footwear.
- Wear special back support devices.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Gradual recovery, but backaches tend to recur.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Chronic low back pain.



## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include laboratory blood studies to determine if there is an underlying disorder, X-rays of the spine, CT or MRI scan.
- Bed rest for first 24 hours. Additional bed rest will be determined by severity of the problem. Recent medical studies indicate that staying more active is better for back disorders than prolonged bed rest.
- Use a firm mattress (place a bed board under the mattress if needed).
- Ice pack or cold massage or heat applied to affected area with heating pad or hot water bottle.
- Physical therapy.
- Massage may help. Be sure person is well-trained or massage could cause more harm than help.
- Wear a special back support device.
- Other options are available depending on degree of injury, such as surgery (if disk damaged), electrical nerve stimulation, acupuncture, special shoes, etc.
- Stress reduction techniques, if needed.

### MEDICATIONS

- Mild pain medications such as aspirin or acetaminophen.
- Stronger pain medicine or a muscle relaxant may be prescribed.
- Note: Medications do not hasten healing. They only help to reduce symptoms.

### ACTIVITY

- Try to continue with daily work or school schedules to the extent possible. Use care in resuming normal activities.
- Avoid strenuous activity for 6 weeks.
- After healing, an exercise program will help prevent re-injury.

### DIET

No special diet. A weight reduction diet is recommended if obesity is a problem.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has mild, low back pain that persists for 3 or 4 days after self-treatment.
- Back pain is severe or recurrent.
- New or unexplained symptoms appear. Medications used in treatment may cause side effects.