

Follow up

Inability to control stool, inability to urinate or numbness at the anus may indicate a medical emergency requiring urgent evaluation

See your family doctor or emergency department if you have:

- *Unexplained fever with back pain*
- *Back pain after a severe blow or fall*
- *Redness or swelling on back or spine*
- *Pain traveling down your legs below the knee*
- *New or worsening weakness or numbness in your buttocks, thigh, leg or pelvis*
- *Burning with urination or blood in your urine*
- *Pain that is worse when you lie down or awakens you at night*
- *Severe pain that does not allow you to get comfortable*
- *Losing weight unintentionally*

Activity

- Walking, riding a stationary bicycle, and swimming are great light cardiovascular exercises. They help blood flow to your back and promote healing. They also strengthen muscles in your stomach and back.
- Stretching and strengthening are important in the long run. Physiotherapy can help you determine when to begin these exercises and how to do so.
- Most experts recommend that people with low back pain continue to work if it is possible to avoid prolonged standing or sitting, heavy lifting, and twisting.

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Low Back Pain

Patient Information



Low
Back
Pain

Low Back Pain



Definition

Pain felt in your lower back may come from the spine, muscles, nerves, or other nearby structures. It may also be due to problems in your mid or upper back, the testicles or ovaries, or a hernia in the groin.

You may feel a variety of symptoms if you've hurt your back. Tingling, a burning sensation, a dull achy feeling, or sharp pain, weakness in legs or feet may occur.

Symptoms

Most people with back pain recover within 4 to 6 weeks. Your doctor will probably not order any tests during the first visit but will do a comprehensive physical exam. However, if you have any symptoms or circumstances below, your doctor may order imaging tests even at this initial exam:

- Pain that has lasted longer than one month
- Numbness
- Muscle weakness
- Accident or injury
- Fever
- Age > 50
- If you have had cancer or strong family history of cancer
- Unexplained weight loss

In these cases the doctor is looking for a tumor, infection, fracture, or serious nerve disorder.

Treatment?

Many people will feel better within one week after the start of back pain. After another 4-6 weeks, the back pain will likely be completely gone.

Here are some tips for how to handle pain early on:

- **Bed rest is not recommended**
- Reduce your activity only for the first couple of days. Then, slowly start your usual activities after that. **Do not perform activities that involve heavy lifting or twisting of your back for the first 6 weeks after the pain begins.** After 2-3 weeks, you should gradually resume exercise
- Apply heat or ice to the painful area. Try ice for the first 48-72 hours, then use heat.
- Take over the counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- While sleeping, try lying in a curled-up, fetal position with a pillow between your legs. If you usually sleep on your back, place a pillow or rolled towel under your knees to relieve pressure.