

Title: Low Back Pain

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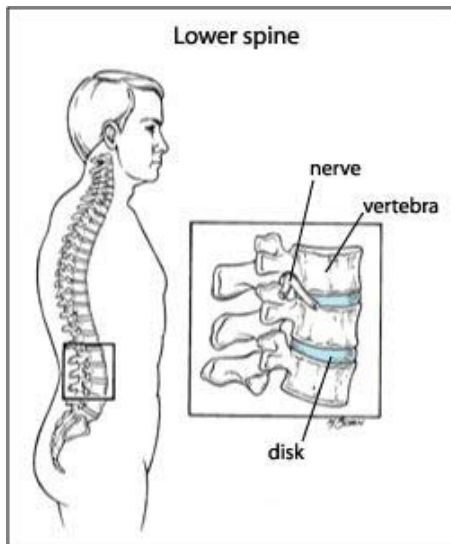
Abstract:

Low Back Pain is a common complaint in the primary care setting. Many patients choose to treat their back pain at home before going to a physician. This pamphlet outlines causes of low back pain, signs that warrant calling a physician, and ways to prevent back pain with simple lifestyle modifications.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Primary Care Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

WHAT CAUSES LOW BACK PAIN?

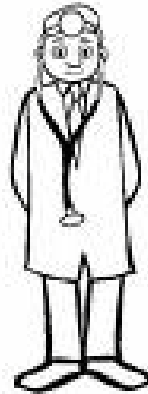
Most commonly pain is caused by participation in activities that are not part of your daily routine such as lifting heavy furniture. It can be caused by muscle spasm, joint injuries, or a slipped disc. A slipped disc refers to a situation when the fluid like material between the bones in your spine bulge out and press on nerves coming out of the spine.



WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY DOCTOR?

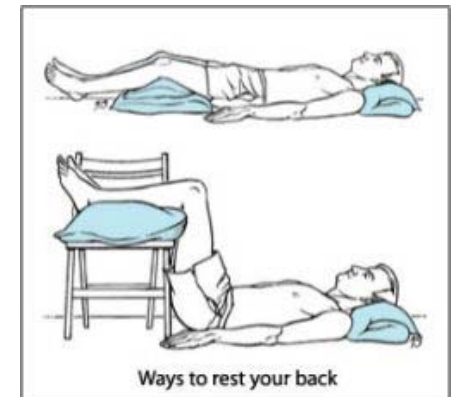
Call your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Numbness or tingling with the pain
- Pain that moves down your leg
- Loss of control of urine or bowels
- Pain that was caused by an injury
- Intense pain that is not relieved with home therapy or over the counter medication
- Pain that lasts longer than 2 weeks
- Pain that is associated with fever, vomiting, stomach pain, or weakness



HOW CAN I TREAT MY BACK PAIN AT HOME?

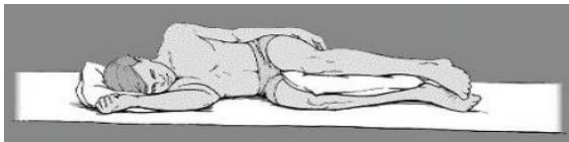
The best position to lie in when your back hurts is shown in the pictures below. You can lie on your back with a pillow under your knees like the top drawing. You can also lie on your back on the floor with pillows under your knees and your feet placed on a chair like the second drawing. Both these positions help take some pressure off your back and provide relief. It is important not to stay in this position for too long. Even if it hurts you should get up and walk around at least once an hour for a few minutes.



You can also take over the counter pain medication like Ibuprofen (Motrin), Naproxen (Aleve), and acetaminophen (Tylenol). This can help reduce the inflammation and pain often associated with back pain. Using ice packs or heat has been shown to be helpful for some people suffering from back pain. Some people find that physical therapy or chiropractic therapy is also helpful when they have back pain.

What SIMPLE changes can I make in my daily life to help my back pain?

- Always try to sit with your back straight and your feet flat on the floor. If you can, sit in a chair with good low back support, and adjust the height so that your knees are slightly above your hips. If you need to sit for a long time, try placing a small pillow behind your lower back for support. If you have a job that requires you to sit in one place for prolonged periods of time such as at a desk or at the wheel of a car, make a conscious effort to get up and stretch every hour.
- When standing, try to imagine making a straight line between your ear, shoulder, and hip. If you stand for long periods at a time, try resting one foot on a low stool, and then switching feet every 10 minutes.
- Try not to sleep on your stomach. The best way to sleep is on your side. You can take pressure off your back by putting one pillow under your head and another between your knees.



- When lifting heavy objects, bend your knees and squat down to lift it up while keeping your back straight. Try not to twist your back when doing this. When moving heavy objects, push instead of pull it.
- Regular exercise and exercises to strengthen the back muscles has also been shown to be effective in reducing back pain.

For more information on low back pain go to the Mayo Clinic website at:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/back-pain/DS00171>

LOW BACK PAIN

CAUSES, TREATMENT, and PREVENTION

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University of Minnesota

Family Medicine Clerkship

Patient Education Tool

