

Low Back Pain

WHAT IS LOW BACK PAIN?

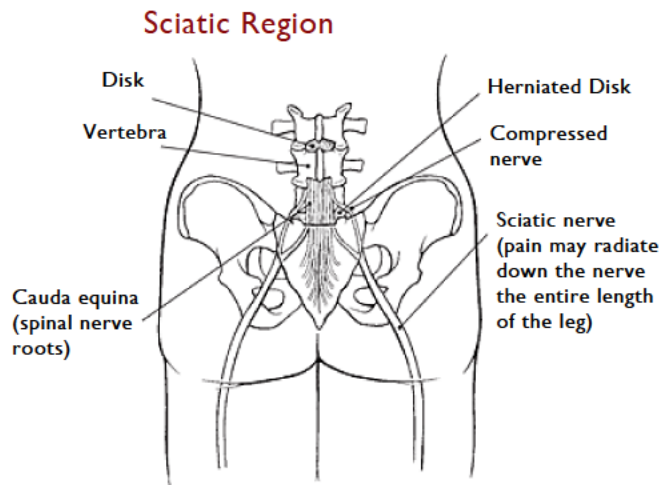
Low back pain is when you feel sore or uncomfortable in your lower back or buttocks.

WHAT CAUSES LOW BACK PAIN?

It is usually caused by muscle strain in your lower back. If you strain a muscle in your back, it can hurt to move it.

Another cause of low back pain is a bulging disk. Disks in your spine give cushioning and support. When a disk bulges, or “herniates,” it may irritate a nerve (see drawings). This can cause pain that travels down your thigh or leg. Pain caused by nerve irritation is called sciatica (sigh-AT-tic-ah).

In rare cases, back pain may be caused by an infection, cancer, or other diseases.



Who gets low back pain and why?

Three out of four people have low back pain at some time in their lives. You can get low back pain from straining to lift heavy objects or by twisting your back. People often hurt their backs when they are moving furniture, playing sports, or gardening.

How long will it last?

Most people slowly start to feel better over a few weeks. Nearly all people are completely better within six to eight weeks.

How will my doctor find the cause of the pain?

Your doctor will ask you questions about your pain and will give you a physical examination.

Will I need to have an x-ray or scan?

Most people don't need to have these tests. Your doctor will decide if you should have one after he or she examines you.

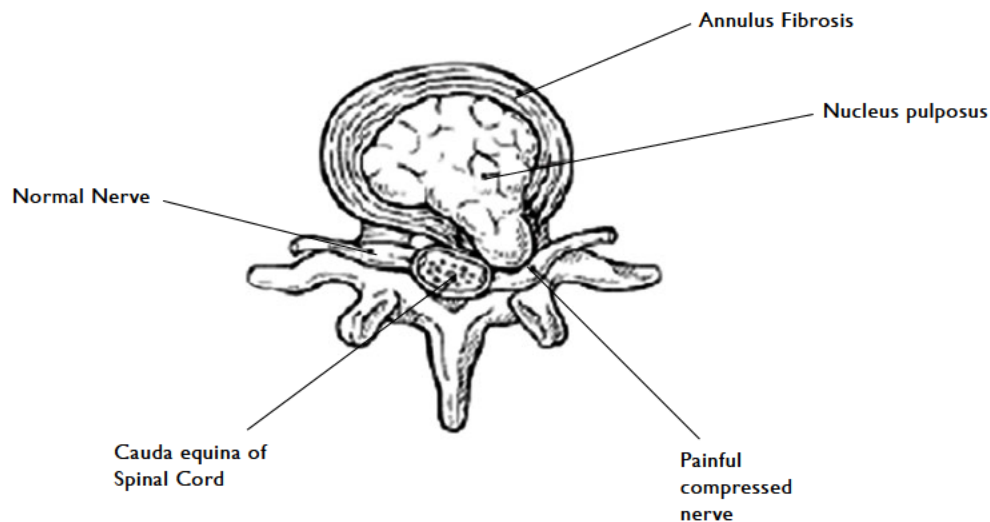
Will bed rest help?

You may need to rest in bed for a day or two, but too much bed rest can stop you from getting better. Some people worry that staying active will hurt their backs more. Getting back to your normal activities may hurt or be uncomfortable, but it shouldn't cause any damage.

What can I do to help with the pain?

- Try not to do things that make the pain worse, like sitting for a long time, lifting heavy objects, or bending or twisting.
- Stick to your normal activities as much as you can. Gentle exercise like walking helps you get better more quickly.
- Some over-the-counter medicines can help pain or swelling. These include ibuprofen (brand name: Advil or Motrin), naproxen (brand name: Aleve or Naprosyn), and acetaminophen (brand name: Tylenol). Your doctor may give you medicine to help with pain or muscle spasms.
- Try using heating pads or taking a warm bath or shower.
- Your doctor can show you some gentle exercises to help stretch your back and make the muscles stronger.
- A physical therapist, massage therapist, or chiropractor may help with your pain and make you feel better.

Herniated Disk Diagram



When should I return to work?

Your doctor can tell you when it's okay for you to return to work. It is important to try to keep active. But, if you have to sit for many hours or do a lot of physical activity at work, you may need to make some changes for a while.

How can I prevent low back pain?

1. You can prevent low back pain with physical therapy, exercises, and stretching. Supports and back belts do not prevent low back pain.
2. Keep in shape, lose weight if you are overweight, and exercise regularly. Being inactive can lead to low back pain. Regular exercise like walking, swimming, or biking is good for your back. These activities put less stress on your back than sitting and standing.
3. Don't lift heavy objects by bending over at the waist. Bend your hips and knees and then squat to pick up the object. Keep your back straight and hold the object close to your body. Don't twist your body while you are lifting.
4. If you have to sit at your desk or drive for a long time, take breaks to stretch.

How can I tell if my back pain is serious?

You should get medical care right away if:

1. You are older than 50
2. The pain was caused by an injury such as a fall or car crash
3. You have trouble sleeping because of the pain
4. You lose weight without trying or have a fever, chills, or a history of cancer
5. You have trouble urinating or controlling your bowels

Tell your doctor if the pain goes down your leg below your knee, or if your leg, foot, or groin feels numb. See your doctor if your pain doesn't get better after two or three weeks of treatment.

LOW BACK PAIN EXERCISE GUIDE

Regular exercises to restore the strength of your back and a gradual return to everyday activities are important for your full recovery. Your orthopaedic surgeon and physical therapist may recommend that you exercise 10 to 30 minutes a day 1 to 3 times a day during your early recovery. They may suggest some of the following exercises. This guide can help you better understand your exercise and activity program, which should be supervised by your therapist and orthopaedic surgeon.

INITIAL EXERCISE PROGRAM

(continued on next page)

Abdominal Contraction

1. Lie on your back with knees bent and hands resting below ribs.
2. Tighten abdominal muscles to squeeze ribs down toward back.
3. Be sure not to hold breath.
4. Hold 5 seconds.
5. Relax.
6. Repeat 10 times.



Wall Squats

1. Stand with back leaning against wall.
2. Walk feet 12 inches in front of body.
3. Keep abdominal muscles tight while slowly bending both knees 45 degrees.
4. Hold 5 seconds.
5. Slowly return to upright position.
6. Repeat 10 times.



Heel Raises

1. Stand with weight even on both feet.
2. Slowly raise heels up and down.
3. Repeat 10 times.



Straight Leg Raises

1. Lie on your back with one leg straight and one knee bent.
2. Tighten abdominal muscles to stabilize low back.
3. Slowly lift leg straight up about 6 to 12 inches and hold 1 to 5 seconds.

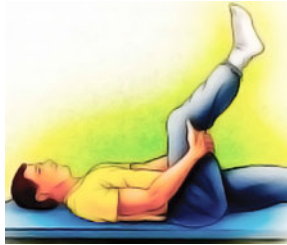


4. Lower leg slowly.
5. Repeat 10 times.

INTERMEDIATE EXERCISE PROGRAM

Single Knee to Chest Stretch

1. Lie on your back with both knees bent.
2. Hold thigh behind knee and bring one knee up to chest.
3. Hold 20 seconds.
4. Relax.
5. Repeat 5 times on each side.



Hamstring Stretch

1. Lie on your back with legs bent.
2. Hold one thigh behind knee.
3. Slowly straighten knee until a stretch is felt in back of thigh.
4. Hold 20 seconds.
5. Relax.
6. Repeat 5 times on each side.

