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Low back pain in adults: Symptom Checker

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**MCV Related tag(s)**

**Primary Location**

Diseases and Conditions

**Tease**

Low back pain can signal a number of conditions. Identify possible common causes based on symptoms you’re experiencing.

**Abstract**

Find possible common causes of low back pain in adults. See our Symptom Checker.

**Benefit Summary**

**Editor**

Gregory Turosak

**Content Producer**

Jay Lenn

**Content Lead**

MayoClinic Com

**Product Lead**

**WPS**

Becky Hynes

**Medical Reviewers**

John Wilkinson, M.D.|Carl Anderson, M.D.

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Adult

**ENTER IN FARCRY:**

**When to get medical help** (1, 2)

Get medical care immediately if you have severe low back pain that:

Follows a fall, blow to your back or other injury

Is constant or intense

Worsens during rest or at night

Spreads down one or both legs

Causes weakness, numbness or tingling in one or both legs

Is associated with new bowel or bladder problems

Is accompanied by fever

Is associated with pain or throbbing in the abdomen

Is accompanied by unexplained weight loss

Also, see your doctor if you start having back pain for the first time after age 50, or if you have a history of cancer, osteoporosis, steroid use, or drug or alcohol abuse.

**Self-care strategies**

Back pain usually improves on its own. In the meantime, try these strategies: (3, 4)

Avoid heavy lifting, pushing, pulling, bending or twisting.

Avoid sitting for long periods of time.

Continue your usual activities as much as possible.

Engage in gentle exercise, such as walking.

Use a heating pad or take a warm bath.

Take an over-the-counter pain reliever, such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others), naproxen (Aleve, others) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others). Use only as directed on the label, and do not take combinations of pain relievers.

**IMAGE**

Spinal anatomy IM02726

Caption: The spine (vertebral column) of a typical adult is composed of 32 vertebrae divided into five sections.

**More Information**

Back pain DS00171

**END OF FARCRY TEXT**

Find possible causes of low back pain based on specific factors. Check one or more factors on this page that apply to your symptom.

**Pain**

Began suddenly

Gradually worsens over time

Is intermittent

**Triggered by**

Everyday activities

Injury

Overuse

**Worsened by**

Movement

Prolonged rest or inactivity

Prolonged sitting or standing

**Relieved by**

Bending over or leaning on something for support

**Accompanied by**

Change in bowel or bladder function

Decreased sensitivity to pain, heat and cold

Eye pain, blurred vision or light sensitivity

Fatigue

Knot or tight spot in back muscle

Leg or foot pain

Paralysis in different parts of body

Stiffness in lower back

Stooped posture

Swelling

Unintended weight loss

Weakness, numbness or tingling in leg or foot

**Possible causes**

These diseases and conditions match at least one of the factors you selected. Those with the most matches are listed first.

DS00483 Ankylosing spondylitis(5)

Pain gradually worsens over time

Pain is intermittent

Worsened by prolonged rest or inactivity

Accompanied by eye pain, blurred vision or light sensitivity

Accompanied by fatigue

Accompanied by leg or foot pain

Accompanied by stiffness in lower back

Accompanied by stooped posture

Accompanied by unintended weight loss

DS00893 Herniated disk (6, p. 44; 7)

Pain began suddenly

Triggered by everyday activities

Triggered by injury

Triggered by overuse

Worsened by movement

Worsened by prolonged sitting or standing

Accompanied by change in bowel or bladder function

Accompanied by leg or foot pain

Accompanied by weakness, numbness or tingling in leg or foot

DS01042 Myofascial pain syndrome (8)

Pain gradually worsens over time

Triggered by injury

Triggered by overuse

Worsened by movement

Accompanied by knot or tight spot in back muscle

Accompanied by stiffness in lower back

DS00019 Osteoarthritis(9)

Pain gradually worsens over time

Triggered by everyday activities

Triggered by overuse

Worsened by movement

Worsened by prolonged rest or inactivity

Worsened by prolonged sitting or standing

Accompanied by stiffness in lower back

Accompanied by swelling

DS00515 Spinal stenosis(10)

Pain gradually worsens over time

Triggered by everyday activities

Triggered by injury

Triggered by overuse

Worsened by movement

Worsened by prolonged sitting or standing

Relieved by bending over or leaning on something for support

Accompanied by leg or foot pain

Accompanied by weakness, numbness or tingling in leg or foot

DS00594 Spinal tumor(11)

Pain gradually worsens over time

Worsened by prolonged rest or inactivity

Accompanied by change in bowel or bladder function

Accompanied by decreased sensitivity to pain, heat and cold

Accompanied by leg or foot pain

Accompanied by paralysis in different parts of body

Accompanied by weakness, numbness or tingling in leg or foot

DS00343 Sprains and strains(12)

Pain began suddenly

Triggered by injury

Triggered by overuse

Worsened by movement

Accompanied by stiffness in lower back

Accompanied by weakness, numbness or tingling in leg or foot

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