



# Low Back Pain—Keep Your Back Strong and Healthy

Four out of five Americans will experience back pain at some point in their lives. It can range from a dull, annoying ache to absolute agony.

**Preventing the Pain**—When it comes to back pain, the best treatment is prevention:

- ✓ **Strengthen the muscles that protect your back.** Strong abdominal muscles help protect the spine; strong hips and legs make proper lifting easier. Be sure to stretch prior to doing any physical activity.
- ✓ **Maintain good posture.** Try to be aware of your posture throughout the day. Whether you're sitting at your desk or brushing your teeth, slouching strains your back.
- ✓ **Lift properly.** Lift only what you can handle. Follow proper lifting techniques:
  - Plan ahead—don't lift in a hurry.
  - Stand close to what you're lifting.
  - Bend at the knees, not the waist.
  - Tighten your stomach muscles.
  - Keep your back straight; lift with your legs.
- ✓ **Listen to your body.** If your back hurts, stop and rest. Try to avoid twisting or reaching.
- ✓ **Stay healthy.** Eat nutritious food, get enough rest and exercise regularly. Maintaining proper body weight can reduce the stress on your back.

**Easing the Pain**—In spite of our best efforts, injuries may still happen. Acute back pain often goes away by itself after a few days or weeks. Self-care can help ease the pain:

- ✓ **Apply cold or heat.** Immediately after an injury, apply a cold compress 3 to 4 times a day for 15 to 20 minutes. Sometimes alternating cold and heat, or applying heat alone may be more effective (again, for 15 to 20 minutes at a time, 3 to 4 times a day).
- ✓ **Rest, but only briefly.** Because it reduces your muscle strength, staying in bed for a long period of time actually can make things worse.
- ✓ **Try over-the-counter pain relievers.** Medications such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen and naproxen sodium can help reduce back pain. But, they may cause other problems, so ask your doctor if it's OK to use them.

**Seek medical attention immediately if:**

- Your pain is due to a fall or blow to your back.
- You have sudden loss of bladder control.
- You have numbness or tingling in your arms, legs, hands or feet.
- You have pain and fever, nausea or vomiting.

**You also should call your doctor if:**

- Your low back pain is not getting better.
- You're pregnant.

**For more information on a wide range of health topics, call Nurse Line any time, 24 hours every day.**

**1-866-243-1238**

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at 1-800-855-2880 and ask for 1-866-243-1238.

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