



# ACHING BACK?

Get the facts about back pain.

Back pain is one of our most common medical problems in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> In fact, in a three-month period, about one in four U.S. adults experience at least one day of back pain.<sup>1</sup> The level of back pain people experience varies. For some, it only lasts a few weeks, regardless of treatment. For others, the pain can be chronic and even prevent them from doing certain things.

Here's some helpful information to help you better understand back pain.

## The anatomy of your back.

Your spine is made up of muscles, ligaments, disks and nerves designed to be very strong, but also very flexible. Most of your body's weight is supported by the back and spinal column.

**Spinal Cord:** A thick cord of nerve tissue that comes off of the base of the brain and runs throughout the spinal column. Spinal nerves branch off the cord to various parts of the body.

**Vertebrae:** Bony building blocks of the spine, stacked on top of each other with disks in between each one.

**Muscles:** The muscles surrounding the spine help support it. They also help hold the body upright and allow the trunk of the body to move, twist and bend in many directions.

**Disks:** The shock absorbers between vertebrae that consist of two parts: a tough outer portion made of collagen and a soft inner core of a gel-like substance.

## Some of the possible causes for back pain<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ Poor posture and alignment
- ▶ Overexertion, typically from strenuous exercise, lifting or movement
- ▶ Traumatic back injuries from sports injuries, falls and accidents
- ▶ Degenerative wear and tear on your disks from normal aging
- ▶ A bulging (slipped) or herniated (ruptured) disk
- ▶ Structural abnormalities like scoliosis
- ▶ Stress
- ▶ Arthritis
- ▶ Pregnancy

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## Treatment

Before back pain can be treated, it needs to be determined if the pain is acute or chronic.

### Acute back pain<sup>1</sup>

Acute back pain usually gets better on its own and without treatment. While exercise is not usually advised, it's a good idea to continue with your usual daily activities as much as you can. Getting up and moving around can help ease stiffness and relieve pain. Over-the-counter pain relievers, such as acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen might also help.

### Chronic back pain<sup>1</sup>

Here are some of the more commonly used, nonsurgical treatments your doctor might suggest to help relieve chronic back pain:

- ▶ Hot or cold packs (or a combination of the two)
- ▶ Exercise
- ▶ Physical therapy – can teach you about proper stretching and exercise
- ▶ Medications – over-the-counter and prescription
- ▶ Healthy behaviors, such as:
  - Proper movement, especially with heavy lifting, pushing, or pulling
  - Relaxation
  - Regular sleep
  - Healthy eating
  - No smoking
  - Proper stretching and exercise – *always talk to your doctor before starting any exercise program*
- ▶ Injections – if medications and other nonsurgical treatments fail
- ▶ Alternative treatments, such as yoga or acupuncture



Source:

1. National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. "Handout on Health: Back Pain." March 2015. [http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health\\_Info/Back\\_Pain/default.asp#5](http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Back_Pain/default.asp#5) (accessed June 9, 2016)

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