



Polyclinics
SingHealth

Lower Back Pain



*Disclaimer: Please note that the instructions shown are strictly for general information only.
If you have any queries, kindly check with your healthcare provider.*



SCAN ME

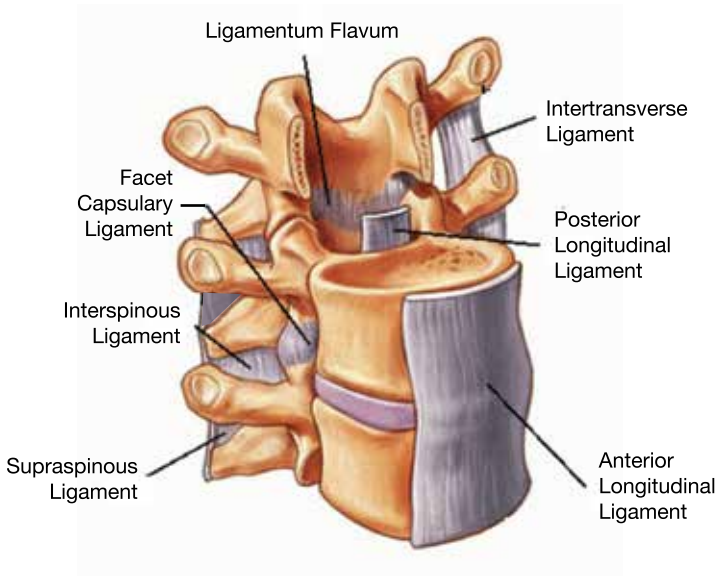


What is lower back pain?

Lower back pain is a common symptom, with 8 in 10 people experiencing at least once during their lifetime.

Most cases of lower back pain are due to benign conditions.

Serious causes of lower back pain account for 1-2% of people with lower back pain.



Our spine consists of the **vertebral bones** (neck/cervical spine, upper back/thoracic spine, lower back/lumbar spine) and the **intervertebral discs**, held together by strong **ligaments and muscles**.

Injury to any of these structures (such as sprain or strain) can cause back pain. However, it might not be possible or important to identify clinically which structure is causing the lower back pain as benign causes of lower back pain would generally respond well to similar conservative treatment.

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What are the common risk factors for lower back pain?

- Overstrain from repetitive or excessive lifting
- Prolonged posture that puts a strain on the spine
- A sedentary lifestyle
- Being overweight or obese
- Smoking



Did you know?

Spondylosis is the term often used to describe the age-related changes found in the spine.

It is common in people above 40 years old, and often have no symptoms!



C

Why do some people have persistent lower back pain?

Chronic pain refers to pain that lasts beyond 3 to 6 months.

For many people, chronic back pain is initially caused by an injury, but the affected area remains very sensitive and painful although the injury has healed.

Chronic pain is also associated with other factors such as stress, poor quality sleep, unhealthy lifestyle, anxiety and depression.

Chronic lower back pain can sometimes have no apparent cause.

D What are the signs and symptoms?

- Back pain
- Stiffness and restriction of movement
- Difficulty in bending or straightening the back
- If the surrounding nerves are irritated, you may also experience weakness, numbness or tingling sensation in the legs
- Coughing or sneezing may aggravate the pain

E How long does it take to recover?

Acute back pain usually improves within 1 to 2 weeks. The pain generally will last less than 6 weeks. Chronic back pain may last for months, or even years.

Over time, most patients with back pain can resume their occupational or recreational activities.

Understanding the causes of pain, and setting progressive and realistic functional goals can be very helpful for many people with chronic pain.





You should seek medical attention early if you have...

- Severe pain that does not improve with rest or medications
- Pain that is severely affecting your sleep or activities
- Progressive loss of function including limb weakness, numbness or tingling
- Swelling, redness or severe pain affecting multiple joints
- Difficulty controlling urination or bowels
- Fever or night sweats
- Unexplained weight loss



Do you need an imaging scan?

Most acute back pains do not need any imaging scan. Your doctor will evaluate your symptoms and may order imaging scan if necessary.

However, if the back pain is prolonged or if there is trauma or injury, doctors may order an X-ray. Further imaging scan like Computed Tomography (CT) or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) are only required in certain situations.





What are the treatment options?

Depending on the condition, your healthcare provider may recommend:

Medications



- For mild to moderate pain: You can take paracetamol or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) e.g. ibuprofen
- For moderate to intense pain: This may require prescription painkillers by your doctor
- See a doctor if you are experiencing widespread pain. Do not self-medicate

Physiotherapy



- Exercise maybe difficult at first if the pain is intense
- Start with gentle exercise as soon as you can to speed up recovery
- Appropriate exercise programme can improve your pain and regain your normal function
- Therapeutic modalities (e.g. Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) or heat pack)

Activity modifications



- Stay active as much as possible
- Avoid prolonged bed rest and start usual activities as soon as you can
- Improve work ergonomics to reduce the strain on your back
- Move and stretch for 2-3 minutes after every 20-30 minutes of sitting

Specialists referral



- Most cases of lower back pain are not due to serious causes, and do not need specialist treatment.
- Your doctor will refer you to see a specialist, e.g. an orthopaedic surgeon, sports physician, rheumatologist or a pain medicine physician only when necessary.



Multi-pronged approach to treating chronic back pain



Lifestyle changes and counselling

Chronic back pain can significantly affect one's social well-being and mental health. Your doctor may refer you to a counsellor or psychologist. Relaxation and behavioural therapy can help to address psychological and social factors that are associated with chronic back pain.

It is also important to adopt lifestyle changes and good habits like getting enough sleep, exercise, stop smoking, good nutrition intake and weight loss if overweight or obese, which can ease chronic back pain.



Common myths and misconceptions

 MYTHS	 FACTS
Lower back pain is usually a serious medical condition.	Persistent back pain can be distressing but it is rarely life-threatening. Serious causes account for 1-2% of people with lower back pain.
Persistent lower back pain is always related to tissue damage.	Chronic pain is rarely associated with serious tissue damage. Injury usually can heal within 3 months. Chronic pain usually indicates other contributing factors such as stress, too little or too much activity which make your back sensitive.
Scans are always needed to detect the cause of lower back pain.	Scans do not usually show the cause of back pain. Many findings such as degenerations, bone spurs, disc bulges and arthritis are common in people without pain. Your doctor will order a scan only if it is necessary.
Lower back pain is caused by poor posture when sitting, standing and lifting.	There is no perfect or poor posture. Keeping your body (upright or slouching) in one posture all the time can lead to muscles fatigue and pain. It is safe to relax in your daily activity. A variety of postures is actually good for your back! More importantly, make sure you move and stretch for 2-3 minutes after every 20-30 minutes of sitting.
I must activate my 'strong' core to protect my back all the time.	Learning to relax in your everyday task is equally important. While being strong is important to perform more physical-demanding activity, tensing up your back muscles all the time can cause fatigue and pain.

❌ MYTHS	✅ FACTS
Repeated loading on the spine results in 'wear and tear' and tissue damage.	Backs do not wear out with everyday loading and bending. Movements make your back stronger. They are safe if you start gradually and practice regularly.
Pain flare-ups are a sign of tissue damage and require rest.	Pain flare-ups do not mean damages. There are many reasons pain can flare-up, such as poor quality sleep, stress, low mood, move too much or too little. Addressing these triggers can be helpful. Stay calm, relax, and try some exercise if you have a pain flare-up!
Treatments such as strong medications, injections and surgery are effective, and necessary, to treat lower back pain.	Injections, surgery and strong drugs usually are not cures for chronic pain. Your doctor will evaluate your condition and refer you to appropriate care and specialists if necessary.

K Practical tips to prevent back pain:

- Avoid prolonged sitting
- Strengthen your legs and back muscles
- Lose weight (if overweight or obese)
- Improve flexibility of the back and lower limb muscles



Simple home exercises:

1



2



3



**You may perform these exercises
2-3 times a day:**

1. Cat camel exercise: **10 repetitions x 3 sets**
2. Knee rolls: **10 repetitions x 3 sets**
3. Bridging exercise: **Hold 10 seconds, 10 repetitions**

Note:

[illegible]

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