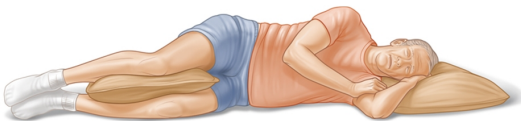


Back Pain: First Aid for Low Back Pain



Back pain has many possible causes. It is often related to problems with muscles and ligaments of the back. It may also be related to problems with the nerves, discs, or bones of the back. Moving, lifting, standing, sitting, or sleeping in an awkward way can strain the back. Sometimes you do not notice the injury until later. Degenerative arthritis is another common cause of back pain.

If your pain is very bad or lasts more than a couple of weeks, call your doctor.

How to manage your back pain

Although it may hurt a lot, back pain usually improves on its own within several weeks. Most people recover in 12 weeks or less. Using good self-care and being careful not to stress your back can help you feel better sooner.

- Sit or lie in positions that are most comfortable and reduce your pain. Try one of these positions when you lie down:

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and supported by large pillows.
- Lie on the floor with your legs on the seat of a sofa or chair.
- Lie on your side with your knees and hips bent and a pillow between your legs.
- Lie on your stomach if it does not make pain worse.
- Do not sit up in bed, and avoid soft couches and twisted positions. Bed rest can help relieve pain at first, but it delays healing. Avoid bed rest after the first day.
- Change positions every 30 minutes. If you must sit for long periods of time, take breaks from sitting. Get up and walk around, or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Try using a heating pad on a low or medium setting for 15 to 20 minutes every 2 to 3 hours. Or you can buy single-use heat wraps that last up to 8 hours. You can also try an ice pack for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
 - Start with an over-the-counter pain medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve). Read and follow all instructions on the label. No one younger than 20 should take aspirin. It has been linked to Reye syndrome, a serious illness.
 - If your doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain or to relax your muscles, take it as prescribed.
 - Do not take two or more pain medicines at the same time unless your doctor tells you to.
- Take short walks several times a day. Start with 5 to 10 minutes, 3 to 4 times a day,

and work up to longer walks. Stick to level surfaces, and avoid hills and stairs until your back is better.

- Return to work and other activities as soon as you can. Continued rest without activity is usually not good for your back. It will delay healing.
- To prevent future back pain, do exercises to stretch and strengthen your back and stomach. Learn how to use good posture, safe lifting techniques, and proper body mechanics.
- Physical therapy may help back pain. Talk to your doctor before getting physical therapy treatment.
- Massage may give you some relief. It helps reduce pain and improve blood flow to your back.
- Chiropractic treatments may help. A chiropractor adjusts the joints and bones in the spine using twisting, pulling, or pushing movements. Some chiropractors use heat, electrical stimulation, or ultrasound to help relax the muscles before they do a spinal adjustment.
- Acupuncture has been shown to help back pain. There is no evidence to show it is better than other treatments. But it may be a good choice to treat your pain.