

Low Back Pain -- “The Epidemic”

In this article, I will discuss with you what low back pain really is, what causes it and how it can be avoided or managed.



Back pain is as much a part of the human condition as the common cold. In fact, eight out of ten adults will experience an acute episode of back pain at some point in their lifetime. Back pain is the second most common cause of missed workdays due to illness and the most common cause of disability. Each year, low back conditions cost millions in lost work, as well as millions in medical, state and insurance resources every year.

Many different structures in the back are capable of producing pain. There are the large nerve roots that go to the legs and smaller nerves that innervate (supply the nerves to) the spine itself. The large paired back muscles may be strained, and the bones, ligaments and joints may be injured.

A low back condition may be caused from a variety of problems. Most low back conditions will usually last from two weeks to three months. Some more traumatic conditions such as a major fall or a car accident may last even longer. For patients with low back pain that lasts longer than three months, or patients with predominantly leg pain, a more specific and definable problem for the pain should be sought. There are several very common causes of low back and leg pain:

In **younger adults** (20-60 year olds) the disc or pelvic joints are likely to be the pain generator and conditions may include:

- Lumbar disc herniation
- Sacroiliac Joint dysfunction
- Spinal Misalignment

In **older adults** (over 60 years old), the source of pain is more likely to be the facet joints or osteoarthritis and conditions may include:

- Facet Joint Osteoarthritis
- Lumbar Spinal Stenosis
- Degenerative Osteoarthritis

Prevention

Stay fit. Regular exercise to keep generally fit is more important than any specific exercises aimed at the back muscles.

Be aware of the posture and position you are in during your daily activities. If you have to lift heavy objects, share the load with other people, and try to hold the weight in close to your body, bending at the knees when possible rather than your back.

If carrying shopping, try to carry similar loads on both sides, and make a number of journeys, rather than trying to carry too much at one go. Consider the use of a shopping cart.

Diagnosis

If in doubt, consult a chiropractor or a medical doctor.



- The first thing is to rule out any other obvious conditions which also cause back pain.
- There are a number of "**red flags**", or warning signs you should be aware of. If any of them applies to you, you should see your doctor soon:
 - You are younger than 20 or older than 55 when you get back pain for the first time.
 - The pain follows a violent injury, such as an automobile accident.
 - The pain is constant and getting worse.
 - You have lost significant weight.
 - You continue to have great difficulty bending forwards.
 - You have developed a number of problems in your nervous system (eg numbness, loss of power, etc).
 - You have developed an obvious structural deformity of your spine.
- You should also see your doctor (either for a first visit, or for a follow-up) if the pain is continuing for more than 4-6 weeks.

Investigations

- In most cases, an X-rays can be very helpful in finding the ediology (reason for) in most low back conditions
- When the pain has continued for a few weeks and conserative treatment has not resolved the pain, your medical doctor or chiropractor may arrange a CT (Computerised Tomography) or MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan. These

can also be very helpful, as they show up the soft structures in the spine, as well as the bones.

- Occasionally your doctor will want to do other tests to look for the rarer causes of back pain.

Treatment

- *Stay active.* Many low back conditions that are not caused by a traumatic event (car accident or fall) may become more painful with inactivity.
- The pain may force you to rest, but this is a result of the pain, and *not* a good treatment for back pain. If you have to take to your bed, limit it, if possible, to a day or two at the most.
- The use of pain killers, muscle relaxers or anti-inflammatory medications may help to reduce some of the pain in the initial or acute stages of the low back condition. Consult your medical doctor before “sampling” with medications.
- Avoid activities likely to put unnecessary strain on your back.
- See your doctor if you think you are in one of the “red flag” categories.



For many unfortunate sufferers, low back pain can be very debilitating. Many low back conditions can be progressive. “Taking it easy” or “self medicating” are usually not the best ways to correct most low back conditions. As with many physical conditions, the sooner the problem can be diagnosed and treated, the less time may be needed to treat the problem. If left untreated, many low back pain conditions may result in surgery being the only option.

NOVA Pain & Rehab Center specializes in the treatment of **Low Back Pain. If you or someone you know is having this problem, call us today and schedule an appointment for a consultation and an evaluation. **Call 703-535-8887 to schedule your appointment.** Remember, waiting to see if the problem will resolve on it own could invite a more serious condition. **Get yourself checked out TODAY!****