

Low back pain is usually caused by muscular strain or ligamentous sprain and is very common. It is associated with painful spasm of the large supportive muscles alongside the spine. The pain is slow to resolve (one to four weeks) and apt to recur.

The onset of pain may be immediate or may occur some hours after the exertion or injury. Often the specific activity, which caused the pain, is not clear-cut.

Most problems causing recent low back pain will heal naturally. Your clinician will manage you with some combination of pain medicine, behavior modification (see reverse side), x-ray studies, and physical therapy, depending on your clinical findings.

Sometimes, referral to an orthopedic specialist is necessary if the pain persists longer than expected or extends down to a lower extremity, or if x-rays show certain abnormalities.

Patience is required as the injury and its accompanying spasm take time to heal. Resting in the "sleeping and resting" positions (see reverse side) is useful as much as practical during the first 1 to 3 days of pain. After that, the pain usually improves slowly over a few days to weeks.

Follow your clinician's instructions as they are directed at your particular situation.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

(Cont. on Back)



Behavior Modification for Low Back Pain

Movement: Move slowly and carefully during the time that the pain is present.

Sitting: Use a hard chair and put your spine up against it; try to keep one or both knees higher than your hips. A small stool is helpful here. For the short rest periods, a contour chair offers excellent support.



Standing: Try to stand with your lower back flat. When you work standing up use a footrest to help relieve swayback. Never lean forward without bending your knees. Ladies take note: shoes with moderate heels strain the back less than those with high heels. Avoid platform shoes.

Sleeping and Resting: Sleep on a firm mattress; put a bedboard (3/4" plywood) under a soft mattress. Do not sleep on your stomach. If you sleep on your back, put a pillow under your knees. If you sleep on your side, keep your legs bent at the knees and at the hips and keep both hands in front of you (lessens the tendency to roll over on to your stomach).



Driving: Get a hard seat for your automobile and sit close enough to the wheel while driving so that your legs are not fully extended when you work the pedals.

Lifting: Make sure you lift properly. Bend your knees and use your leg muscles to lift. Avoid sudden movements. Keep the load close to your body, and try not to lift any heavy item higher than your waist.



Working: Do not overwork yourself. If you can, change from one task to another before you feel fatigued. If you work at a desk all day, get up and move around whenever you have the chance.

Exercise: Get regular exercise (walking, swimming, etc.) once your backache is gone. But start slowly to give your muscles a chance to warm up and loosen up before attempting anything strenuous.

See your Doctor: If your back acts up and isn't improving within a few days, see your doctor—don't wait until your condition gets severe.