

DESCRIPTION

Pain in the middle and lower back is usually caused by muscle strain. It may also include sciatica (pain that radiates from the back to the buttock and down into the leg). Onset of pain may be immediate or occur some hours after an activity or injury. The symptoms develop into a cycle beginning with a muscle spasm, the spasm then causes pain, and the pain results in additional muscle spasms. You may also experience pain and stiffness that may be ongoing, or only occur when you are in certain positions. The pain may get worse by coughing, sneezing, bending, or twisting.

CAUSES

- Strain or sprain. Muscles, tendons, or ligaments of the lower back become stretched or torn.
- Injury or a fracture.
- Congenital problems.
- Bone and joint conditions of the back, including arthritis, osteoporosis, spinal nerve irritation or inflammation, disk problems, infections, weaker and thinner bones from aging, and others.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Exertion or lifting; a severe blow, or a fall.
- Sitting or driving for long periods of time.
- Aging. After age 20, bones start to lose their strength.
- Gardening and other yard work.
- Sports and exercise activities.
- Overweight.
- Smoking.
- Poor body mechanics and poor posture.

GENERAL MEASURES

- Recovery is gradual with time and treatment. Possible complications include chronic low back pain and sciatica.
- Your healthcare provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your back pain symptoms. Tests may include labs, x-rays of the spine, and other imaging studies. These can help determine the specific cause of the back pain.
- Treatment will depend on the cause of the pain. A combination of medication and reduced activities for a short period of time is usually all that is needed.
- An ice pack, cold massage, heating pad, or hot water bottle applied to the area may help to reduce pain.
- Other options are available depending on degree of injury, such as physical therapy, surgery (if a disk is damaged), electrical nerve stimulation, special shoes, etc.
- Use mild pain medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen or acetaminophen.
- Stronger pain medications, muscle relaxants, and medicines to reduce inflammation may be prescribed. (Note: Pain Medications do not hasten healing. They only help to reduce symptoms.)

MEDICATIONS

- Use mild pain medicines such ibuprofen, naproxen or acetaminophen.
- Stronger pain medications or muscle relaxants may be prescribed. (Note: Pain Medications do not hasten healing. They only help to reduce symptoms.)
- Oral steroids may also be prescribed to reduce inflammation.

You should begin your steroid prescription today.

You should begin your steroid prescription tomorrow.

↳ Unless your doctor tells you differently, always finish the full course of your antibiotic and/or steroid prescription, even if you start to feel better.

ACTIVITY

Recent medical studies indicate that staying more active is often better for back disorders than prolonged bed rest.

- Try to continue with daily schedules to the extent possible. Use care in resuming normal activities.
- Avoid strenuous activity for 6 weeks.
- After healing, an exercise program will help prevent re-injury.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- You develop a fever.
- You experience a loss of bowel or bladder control.
- You notice numbness or tingling in your legs.
- You develop any new or unexplained symptoms.