



## Preventing low back pain

After the first time you have had low back pain, you are likely to have it again. To help keep your back healthy and avoid further pain:

- Practice good posture.
- Get regular, low-impact exercise. Walk, swim, or ride a stationary bike.
- Wear low-heeled shoes with good support.
- Sleep on your side. A medium-firm mattress may put the least stress on your back.
- Watch your weight. Being too heavy, especially around your waist, puts extra stress on your back.
- Don't try to lift things that are too heavy for you. When you must lift, bend your knees and keep your back straight, keep the object you are lifting close to your belly button, and avoid lifting and twisting at the same time. See a picture of proper lifting technique.

If you sit or stand for long periods at work:

- Pay attention to your posture. Sit or stand up straight, with your shoulders back.
- Make sure your chair has good back support.
- Take regular breaks to walk around.

If your work involves a lot of bending, reaching, or lifting:

- Talk to your human resources department to see if there are other ways you can do your work.
- Don't depend on a "back belt" to protect your back. Studies have not shown these belts to be effective in reducing back injuries. The most they can do is to help remind you to use good techniques for lifting.

## Do You Have Questions About Back or Neck Pain?

If you would like more information about our program, or have questions about back or neck pain, we sponsor FREE seminars. You will learn about the causes of back and neck pain, the latest treatments, plus tips about diet, exercise and medication. *To learn more about our programs and seminars, call Provena St. Josephs Medical Center or Provena St. Mary's Hospital.*



## PROVENA Saint Joseph Medical Center

### Neuroscience Institute

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## PROVENA St. Mary's Hospital

### Neurosciences

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## Understanding Low Back Pain



## PROVENA Health

**powerful healing**



## What is low back pain?



Low back pain can affect the back anywhere below the ribs and above the legs. The lower back is the connection between the upper and lower body, and it bears most of the body's weight. Because of these roles, it is easily injured when you lift, reach, or twist.

Almost everyone has low back pain at one time or another. The good news is that most low back pain will go away in a few weeks with some basic self-care. But if your pain is severe or lasts more than a couple of weeks, see your doctor.

## What causes low back pain?

Some types of low back pain have no known causes. Others can be traced to injury such as sprains, strains or medical conditions.

## What are the symptoms?

Depending on the cause, low back pain can cause a range of symptoms. It may:

- Be dull, burning, or sharp.
- Be felt at a single point or over a broad area.
- Come on gradually or suddenly.
- Occur with muscle spasms or stiffness.
- Cause leg symptoms, such as pain, numbness, or tingling, often extending below the knee.

These symptoms can occur on their own or along with low back pain. Leg symptoms are often caused by lower spine problems that place pressure on a nerve that leads to the leg.

A rare but serious problem called cauda equina syndrome can occur if the nerves at the end of the spinal cord are squeezed. Seek emergency treatment if you have weakness or numbness in both legs, or loss of bladder or bowel control.

### Bulging Disc



### Arthritis



### Instability



### Ruptured or Herniated Disc



## How is it diagnosed?

The doctor will ask questions about your past health, symptoms, and work and physical activities. He or she will also do a physical exam. Your answers and the exam can help the doctor rule out a serious cause for the pain. In most cases, doctors are able to recommend treatment after the first exam.

Most people do not need further testing. Imaging tests such as x-rays, CT scans, and MRIs are not helpful for diagnosing most episodes of low back pain. In most cases, they are only used if the doctor suspects a serious problem, such as a herniated disc, a broken bone, or cancer, or if surgery is being considered or planned. You might also have imaging tests if worker's compensation or a lawsuit is involved.

## What are the treatments?

The good news for many is that low back pain is a self-limiting condition that will go away with simple bed rest. For others, it may become a chronic problem requiring further treatment.



**Physical therapy:** assists in relieving symptoms and teaches patients how to prevent future recurrences.

**Medications:** can help to reduce pain and inflammation.

**Epidural steroid injections:** (ESI) deliver anti-inflammatory medication directly to the inflamed area and provide temporary relief.



**Exercises:** can be helpful in alleviating painful symptoms and preventing pain from recurring in the future. A physical therapist or your doctor can recommend the most beneficial exercises for your symptoms.