

Back Pain: The Basics

Back pain is one of the most common medical conditions experienced by people in the United States. There are many muscles, tendons, and ligaments in the back, and in children and adolescents, the most common cause of back pain is muscular sprains and/or strains. Muscular back pain can occur in any part of the back including the neck, shoulder, midback and low back/buttocks area. It may resolve on its own, but sometimes it can be persistent, and your doctor may recommend specific treatments.



Acute back pain happens suddenly, lasting a few days to a few weeks.

Subacute back pain can come on suddenly or gradually, lasting 1-3 months.

Chronic back pain may come on suddenly or gradually, lasting longer than 3 months.

Symptoms of muscular back pain

The intensity of muscular back pain varies from person to person. You may experience any or all the following:

- Pain that is sharp, dull, burning, aching, spasming or otherwise uncomfortable in nature
- Increasing pain with activities of daily living, such as lifting or bending
- Increasing pain when in a prolonged position such as when resting, sitting, or standing
- Back pain that comes and goes, or is present constantly
- Stiffness or the sensation of tight muscles which improves with movement or activity
- Pain that may spread from the back to the shoulders or upper buttocks

What are the common causes of muscular back pain?

Muscular strains: The back has multiple layers of muscles which provide support and aid in motion. Strains can happen if one of these muscles, or their tendons, are overworked or weak and can occur in both sedentary and active individuals.

Ligament sprains: Ligaments are connective tissue which connect the bones of the spine, ribcage, and pelvis, providing stability. They can become injured with a sudden, forceful movement, or become stretched with stress over time.

Poor posture/muscular imbalance: Poor postural alignment, such as slouching in bed, "tech neck" from using electronic devices, and hunching at a desk can all contribute to muscular back pain and muscular imbalances. Prolonged positioning can cause fatigue in the back muscles and tightness in the anterior chest muscles, which can compound the discomfort.

Repetitive activities: Activities which require repetition or practice of a specific movement can cause back pain, usually from overuse and lack of rest of the muscle group. Over time, this can cause chronic pain in that area.

How is muscular back pain treated?

Activity modification and rest: The first step is to avoid the aggravating trigger if it is related to a specific activity. Prolonged sitting and standing, as well as bending/twisting should also be avoided if it causes pain. Once the pain is improving, this may be re-introduced. Walking is encouraged!

Conservative Treatments: Simple home treatments may make a big difference in how your back feels. These may include warm or cold compresses, use of a lumbar support for a short time, or gentle massage, which can all help reduce the sensation of pain and spasms.

Medications: Your doctor may recommend taking medications for a short time that help with pain and/or inflammation such as Tylenol or over the counter NSAIDS. If the pain is very severe, they may prescribe stronger anti-inflammatories or steroids.

Home exercises and conditioning: Exercises to address conditioning and stretching of the core and back muscles are the most important factor in treating muscular back pain. You may be provided with a home exercise handout or be sent to physical therapy. Maintaining a home program is the best way to prevent a recurrence and keep your back strong and flexible!

Physical therapy: Here you will work with a professional who will evaluate and develop a plan to treat your muscular back pain over the course of a few weeks. Therapy can be an invaluable tool to strengthen, stretch and balance your muscles. A home exercise program will be provided as well, which should help prevent future recurrences.

Body mechanics: Proper body mechanics and posture can improve your muscular back pain and prevent future back issues. Examples include bringing tasks to eye level, adjusting seating, and using leg muscles for lifting objects just to name a few. Take good care of your back and it will take good care of you!

Additional Resources: If you are interested in exploring more about back pain the website listed below contain useful information and examples of exercises to manage it!

Nicklaus Children's Hospital Center for Spinal Disorders

[nicklauschildrens.org/Spine](https://www.nicklauschildrens.org/Spine)



**Nicklaus
Children's
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