



Back pain

Back off! Has back pain ever made you feel that ornery? At some point in your life, you may join—if you haven't already—the eight out of ten people who find their lives interrupted by back pain. Luckily, you can take many steps to prevent back pain or to manage it, if it does occur.

Back pain can come on suddenly—maybe after falling or lifting a heavy box. This is called acute back pain. If it lasts for more than three months, it is chronic. Pain may range from a dull ache to a sharp, shooting pain—one that can even radiate down your leg. This is sciatica.

Many things can contribute to your risk for back pain, including heredity and age, which you can't control. But you have a great deal of control over other risk factors. For example, keeping muscles strong and flexible with exercise is one of the best ways to prevent back pain. If you avoid smoking, eat a healthy diet, and manage your weight, you'll also go a long way toward preventing back problems.

Using good posture and body mechanics are essential. This puts less pressure on your spine. Learn how to sit with your back aligned. Lift by bending your knees and squatting. Push, don't pull, heavy loads. And, don't forget to take frequent breaks throughout the day.

But what if you wrench your back during that weekend tennis match? Or, your back muscles start to spasm after too many hours in front of a computer screen?

For a sudden injury, sometimes the best thing to do is to take a wait-and-see approach. Use gentle movements, and don't stay in bed for more than one or two days. Lie in a position that takes pressure off your back, such as flat on your back with a pillow under your knees. Acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen can make a big difference. Come to me for advice about this.

You can also try a combination of cold and heat for pain relief. Cold packs are great for reducing inflammation and heating pads can enhance blood flow, which reduces painful muscle contractions called spasms. I can advise you about which to use and how often. See your doctor if self-care gets you no response within 72 hours.

If your back pain becomes chronic, visit your doctor to discuss the best options for you. In addition to over-the-counter (OTC) analgesics and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs), a prescription pain-reliever or muscle relaxant may help. Also ask about alternative therapies, such as spinal manipulation, massage, or acupuncture. In some cases, surgery is needed, but usually it is not required.

Ask yourself whether you can take steps to get better sleep or to better manage your stress. These changes can also make a big difference.

Remember to call your doctor if you have any of these signs or symptoms: severe back pain after an injury or that doesn't improve with rest; numbness or tingling; or back pain combined with weakness, trouble urinating, or fever. These can be signs of a more serious problem.



If you have any questions please feel free to contact me @ 873-3244 or mcglynnrx@tds.net

Thanks, Dan McGlynn