

Lower Back Pain

What is it?

At one time or another, most Americans will suffer from lower back pain. Most often, it can be prevented or treated by the patient, but it can also be a symptom of a more serious, treatable chronic back problem. Lower back pain can be caused by a variety of factors, such as ageing, arthritis, injury, strain, or simple overuse. Because lower back pain is so common, but so debilitating, self-care and physician care are important.

Symptoms

While symptoms of lower back pain vary from patient to patient, the most common in acute and/or recurring pain and tenderness in the back, sometimes accompanied by numbness or tingling in the legs. The pain can be at a single point, or spread over the entire lower back region.

Diagnosis

If you are experiencing lower back pain that does not lessen after two weeks of self-care, or if the pain worsens and/or spreads, please consult your physician for a diagnosis and treatment plan. To diagnose the cause of your lower back pain, your physician will likely ask you detailed questions about your pain and your physical activities. He or she will also perform a physical exam. Lab and imaging tests, such as X-rays and MRIs are often NOT performed, since they do not aid in the diagnosis of muscle-related back pain. They will only be performed if your physician suspects an injury, such as a herniated disc or broken bone.

To gain an accurate diagnosis, it is important that you clearly and carefully describe your symptoms to your physician. It's a good idea to keep a journal of your lower back pain episodes to share with your physician, to help diagnose your back pain as acute, recurring, and/or chronic.

Brought to you by the caring physicians at:

Rochester Medical Group
3950 S. Rochester Road, Suite 1200
Rochester Hills, MI 48307
Phone (248) 844-6000

Treatments

Because often lower back pain is caused by overuse or strain of the muscles of the lower back, most often a treatment plan will consist of a combination of the following elements:

- ✓ Over-the-counter pain and anti-inflammatory medication, taken on a regular schedule
- ✓ Heating pad on the affected area for 15 minutes every 3 hours
- ✓ Physical therapy to strengthen the back muscles. Physical therapy may be performed at home, as part of a self-care fitness regimen, or at a physician's office. The best exercise for strengthening the muscles of the lower back is simple walking.

If your physician diagnoses a lower back injury, he or she may recommend surgery, but very few patients require surgery to address chronic lower back pain.



Helpful Hints

Because lower back pain is often caused by strain and overuse, prevention is key in avoiding further lower back pain incidents. To prevent lower back pain, your physician may recommend the following:

- ✓ Losing weight, if your weight is an issue
- ✓ Smoking cessation
- ✓ Wearing low-heeled, supportive shoes
- ✓ Using proper lifting technique
- ✓ Get regular exercise, especially those that will strengthen your core muscles

