

# 30 Things You Should Know About Your Back

Most people suffer from back pain at some point in their lives. But there are many things you can do to keep your back in good shape and lower your risk of back pain.

1. Your backbone has more than 30 bones stacked one on top of the other. These bones are called vertebrae.
2. Between each vertebra are disks full of fluid. The disks act like shock absorbers to protect your bones when you move.
3. Ligaments, tendons and muscles work together to hold your vertebrae in place.
4. Back pain is one of the most common reasons people visit the doctor or miss work.
5. Back pain can be a dull and constant ache or a sudden, sharp pain.
6. The lower back is the most common site of back pain.
7. Lower back pain can happen at any age. It happens most often to people between the ages of 30 and 50.
8. As people get older, the disks between the vertebrae begin to lose fluid and flexibility, which makes the vertebrae less protected.
9. Bone strength and muscle tone decrease as we age. This makes back pain more likely.
10. Back injuries can happen when a person incorrectly lifts a heavy object. They can also be caused by a fall or other accident. They can happen at work or when playing sports.
11. Back pain is often caused by a muscle spasm or strain.
12. Back pain can happen when vertebrae are compressed, causing a disk to bulge or rupture. This causes pressure on a nerve.



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This pamphlet is not a substitute for professional medical care. If you have questions or concerns, please talk with a health care provider.

13. Not all back pain is a result of injury.
14. Conditions that can cause back pain include arthritis, osteoporosis and other bone diseases, infections or an irregular curve of the spine.
15. Obesity, smoking, stress, weight gain, poor posture and a lack of physical fitness can add to back pain.



16. To find the cause of back pain, a health care professional will give you a physical exam and take your medical history. They may also need to order blood tests or x-rays.
17. Most back pain is acute (short-term). It will get better on its own within a few days or weeks.

18. With acute back pain, it is best to get up and move around. Bed rest for more than a few days can slow the healing process.

19. Your health care provider may suggest medications such as acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen to help ease back pain.



20. Back pain that lasts longer than three months is considered chronic.
21. Chronic back pain is often treated with cold and hot packs, specially designed exercises, stretching and medications. In most cases, it does not require surgery.

22. See a health care provider right away if you have:
  - Numbness, tingling or weakness in one or both legs.
  - Pain that is severe and doesn't improve with rest and medications.
  - Back pain from a fall or injury.
  - Trouble with bowels or bladder.
  - A fever, unintended weight loss or abdominal pain.

23. Back pain and injuries are often preventable.

24. Getting regular exercise is one of the best things you can do to prevent back pain.

25. Ask your health care provider to recommend exercises to keep your lower back and stomach muscles strong.

26. Always use proper lifting techniques. Lift with your knees, keeping your back straight and the object close to your body.



27. Never twist while lifting. Avoid lifting things that are too heavy for you.

28. Good posture while sitting or standing can prevent back pain.

29. If you smoke, quit! Smoking cigarettes can reduce the flow of blood and vital nutrients to the disks of your lower back. This may cause them to wear out sooner.

30. Pay attention to your diet. Maintaining a healthy weight and getting enough calcium and vitamin D can help keep your back pain free.