

About the Back and Back Problems

The lower part of the back holds most of the body's weight. Even a minor problem with the bones, muscles, ligaments, or tendons in this area can cause pain when a person stands, bends, or moves around. Less often, a problem with a disc can pinch or irritate a nerve from the spinal cord, causing pain that runs down the leg, below the knee called sciatica.

If you have a low back problem, you may have symptoms that include:

- Pain or discomfort in the lower part of the back.
- Pain or numbness that moves down the leg (sciatica).

Seeing a health care provider

A visit to your health care provider is a good idea if:

- Your symptoms are severe.
- The pain is keeping you from doing things that you do every day.
- The problem does not go away within a few days.



Things You Can Do Now

While waiting for your back to improve, you may be able to make yourself more comfortable if you:

- Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.
- Make sure your work surface is at a comfortable height for you.
- Use a chair with a good lower back support that may recline slightly.
- If you must sit for long periods of time, try resting your feet on the floor or on a low stool, whichever is more comfortable.
- If you must stand for long periods of time, try resting one foot on a low stool.
- If you must drive long distances, try using a pillow or rolled-up towel behind the small of your back. Also, be sure to stop often and walk around for a few minutes.
- If you have trouble sleeping, try sleeping on your back with a pillow under your knees, or sleep on your side with your knees bent and a pillow between your knees.

Exercise

A gradual return to normal activities, including exercise, is recommended. Exercise is important to your overall health and can help you to lose body fat (if needed). Even if you have mild to moderate low back symptoms, the following things can be done without putting much stress on your back:

- Walking short distances.
- Using a stationary bicycle.
- Swimming.

It is important to start any exercise program slowly and to gradually build up the speed and length of time that you do the exercise. At first, you may find that your symptoms get a little worse when you exercise or become more active. Usually, this is nothing to worry about. However, if your pain becomes severe, contact your health care provider. Once you are able to return to normal activities comfortably, your health care provider may recommend further aerobic and back exercises.

Prevention of Low Back Problems

The best way to prevent low back problems is to stay fit. If you must lift something, even after your back seems better, be sure to:

- Keep all lifted objects close to your body.
- Avoid lifting while twisting, bending forward, and reaching.

You should continue to exercise even after your back symptoms have gone away. Many exercises can be done to condition muscles of your body and back. You should talk to your health care provider about the exercises that would be best for you.