



# Preventing, Reducing & Treating Back Pain

## Tips to identify and resolve back pain related problems

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**B**ackpain can be debilitating and if left untreated can profoundly affect your overall quality of life. The number of people experiencing backpain in America is on the rise. Approximately 80 percent of adult's will have backpain at some point in their lives. Work injuries, obesity, pregnancy and aging can all cause a degeneration of the spine.

### Back Pain Can Range From Acute To Chronic

Acute backpain is short term and can range from a few weeks to several months and is usually caused by an accident or fall. It usually resolves on its own with little or no treatment. Chronic backpain lasts more than six months, is less common than acute backpain, and can be treated without surgery.

Resolution of backpain:

- 90 percent resolve in six weeks
- 60-80 percent have a recurrence within two years
- 7 percent develop chronic back pain.

### Treating Backpain

Treatment regimens can vary drastically from medication and physical therapy to holistic therapies.

Analgesics, anti-inflammatory medications, muscle relaxants and opioids work to decrease and control back pain. These medications can have side effects. Research studies suggest that opioids should be used as a last resort to treat backpain. Many of them are addictive and do not address the underlying cause of pain.

Nerve blockers, and epidural steroid injection procedures are used for chronic back pain. These treatments are put into place when the source of backpain is known.

Alternative therapies such as massage, acupuncture, and biofeedback therapy all work to decrease the bodies inflammatory process thus decreasing pain.

### Exercise for Back Pain is Good

Exercise may not alleviate back pain altogether but it can make backpain less frequent. When the

cause of the back pain is unknown, prescribing targeted therapy can prove difficult, and general exercise is often recommended. "An episode of acute low back pain is a call to `action for people who are simply not exercisers," says Dr. Jeffrey N. Katz, professor of orthopedic surgery and medicine at Harvard Medical School. "It is a good time to make a commitment to exercise when you are starting to feel a bit better—typically in a few weeks."

If you have never exercised before, starting can be overwhelming. The best way to start is to keep it simple and start walking. Commit at least 15 minutes a day to walking either in your neighborhood, on a treadmill, or on your lunch time at work. Slowly increase your walking time by 5 minutes a week and you may experience less pain.

Daily exercise and or walking of 30-40 minutes a day has shown to increase endorphins. Endorphins are those "feel good" chemicals in the brain that bind to opiate receptors and control pain. Similar to morphine and codeine endorphins work to eradicate pain which is the body's natural

alternative to opiates and pain medications.

**Core Strength.**

The “core” of your body exists in your mid-section. It’s the center of gravity. These muscles include the abdominal, hip, and back muscles. Strengthening your core muscles could prevent backpain.

“Without a strong core, your body will rely more on your passive structures, such as your ligaments and bones, which places more stress on discs and therefore increases your likelihood of injury,” adds Melanie Strasberg, P.T., D.P.T., clinical director of Professional Physical Therapy in New Rochelle, New York.

**Yoga**

Yoga, the act of meditation, deep breathing and employing stretching poses can also help prevent, eliminate and alleviate back pain. The perfect poses for an achy, sore back are: Cow and Cat stretches to loosen your back muscles, whether as part of a yoga routine or as a warm-up for another workout.

Try it: Starting in an all-fours position, move into Cat pose by slowly pressing your spine up and arching your back.

**Diet And A Healthy Weight**

A diet rich in refined sugars, complex carbohydrates, fats, and foods leading to inflammation could be making backpain symptoms worse. Extra weight can accumulate in the midsection throwing your bodies center of gravity forward which puts more stress on the back. Diet modification and eliminating foods causing inflammation are necessary.

**Vitamins**

Getting enough calcium to strengthen bones can reduce the risk of osteoporosis. In addition, Vitamin D helps your body use the calcium you get from foods to make your bones stronger. If you are spending long periods at a desk indoors, it’s best to get your vitamin D levels assessed and perhaps add a daily supplement.

**Propper Shoes And Good Posture**

Improper foot wear, flat feet, and hyper-pronation can be the causes to backpain. When you walk, five times the body weight is placed on your feet. It’s



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important to be seen by a podiatrist, wear proper foot wear and use the correct type of insoles.

Poor posture (sitting or standing) can also contribute to backpain. The way we hold our body when we are sitting, standing, lifting, bending, pulling or reaching can greatly affect our chances of back pain. If you have good posture, the bones in the vertebrae are correctly aligned.

**Red Flags To Back Pain**

If your backpain suddenly becomes chronic and does not go away this may be a red flag to a disease process occurring in the body. These red

flag symptoms include:

- back pain with fever
- back pain that does not improve or worsens over time
- numbness in the groin
- loss of bladder or bowel control
- leg weakness
- inability to find a comfortable sitting or sleeping position

If any of these symptoms are present during an episode of back pain, further medical attention is needed in order to properly diagnose the cause.

**Prevention Is Key**

The cost of backpain in America can range from 50 billion dollars a year on treatments to 100 billion dollars a year which come from indirect costs. The key to cutting costs and preventing backpain include reducing risk, minimizing injury and prevention of recurrence focusing on a speedy recovery. Back strengthening exercises twice a week, standing and stretching after long periods of sitting, avoid heavy lifting and eating a balanced diet to avoid obesity are essential practices which can lead to a healthy back. ■

**Resources**

- <https://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/patient-caregiver-education/fact-sheets/low-back-pain-fact-sheet>
- <https://www.thegoodbody.com/back-pain-statistics/>
- <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/322582.php>
- <https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/where-it-hurts/back-pain/back-care/back-pain-prevention.php>
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/pain/daily-moves-to-prevent-low-back-pain>
- <https://healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Category/everyday-healthy-living/safety/prevent-back-pain>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4934575/>
- <https://www.self.com/gallery/core-exercises-for-lower-back-pain-relief>
- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/the-safe-way-to-do-yoga-for-back-pain>
- <https://www.healthline.com/health/fitness-exercise/yoga-for-back-pain#cobra-pose>

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