

Patient Information: Low Back Pain



When should I see a doctor for low back symptoms?

- New, severe low back pain
- Low back pain not improved by rest, activity modification, or over-the-counter medications
- Pain, numbness, or tingling that radiates from your back into your legs

What can cause low back problems?

- Degeneration of the discs that cushion your vertebrae (spinal bones) from injury
- Weakness or imbalance in your abdominal and back muscles (core)
- Poor posture
- Abnormal curvature of the spine (scoliosis, lordosis)
- Fractures or stress injuries to your vertebrae from trauma or overuse



How are low back problems diagnosed?

- Your doctor will perform an exam to evaluate your muscle strength, posture, spinal alignment, and sources of pain
- X-rays can be obtained to evaluate the bones of your spine
- An MRI may be obtained to evaluate the muscles, cartilage, and bones in your back
- A nerve study called an EMG may be ordered to evaluate symptoms of numbness, tingling, or weakness



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How are low back problems treated?

- The initial treatment for most low back problems is conservative care:
 - Resting from activities that increase pain
 - Taking medications such as anti-inflammatories
 - Applying ice and heat
 - Doing regular light stretching of back muscles
- If your pain persists, certain anti-inflammatory injections may be performed
- The goal is to help manage pain so that you can perform physical therapy and strengthening- the most important part of treatment for low back pain is strengthening and stabilizing the muscles that support your spine
- In certain severe cases, surgery may be indicated



How can I prevent low back problems?

- Perform regular core stretching and strengthening exercises
- Maintain good posture and spinal alignment by using supportive chairs and mattresses, standing regularly at work, and lifting with good form (bending at the knees rather than the back)
- Proactively address back pain when it starts

Where can I learn more about low back health?

- Education- OrthoInfo:
<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/diseases--conditions/low-back-pain/>
- Spine rehabilitation and conditioning- OrthoInfo:
https://www.orthoinfo.org/globalassets/pdfs/2017-rehab_spine.pdf
- Yoga for back pain- Yoga with Adriene:
<http://yogawithadriene.com/yoga-for-back-pain/>

To schedule an appointment, visit the Steward St. Elizabeth's Sports Medicine website at: semc.org/services-directory/orthopedics/sportsmedicine
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Adapted from: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (www.aaos.org), Hospital for Special Surgery (www.hss.edu), Mayo Clinic (www.mayoclinic.org)
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