

Low Back Pain

Take Control, Live Better



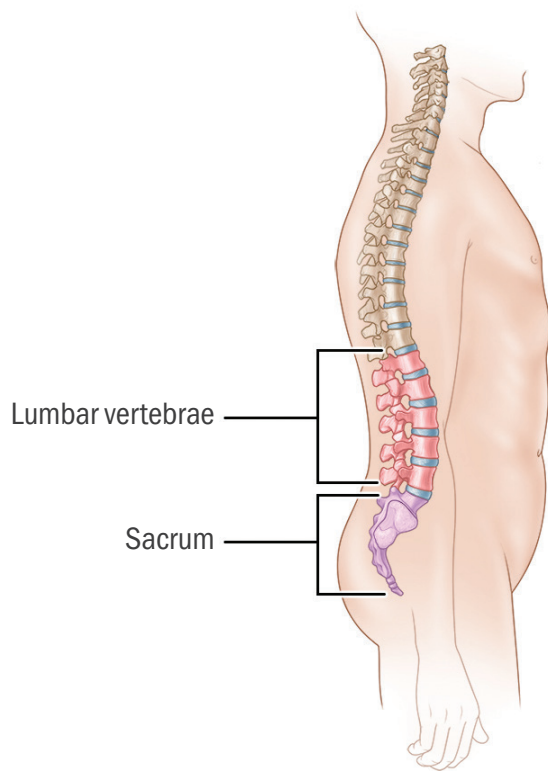
Low back pain

Your back is the whole area from your neck to your tailbone. It includes the bones (vertebrae) and joints of the spine, the spinal discs that separate and cushion the bones, and the muscles and ligaments that hold them all together. You can stress or hurt any of these parts of your back.

Low back pain can affect the back anywhere below the ribs and above the legs. The lower back, called the lumbar or lumbosacral region, is the connection between the upper and lower body. It bears most of the body's weight. Because of these roles, it is easily injured when you lift, reach, or twist.

Almost everyone has low back pain at one time or another.





The lumbar or lumbosacral region is the most common site for back pain.

Common causes of back pain

Most back pain is caused by:

- ▶ Overuse injuries. These are caused by repeating movements or staying too long in positions that strain the back.
- ▶ Sudden injuries. These are caused by moving in a sudden or awkward way that hurts the back.

These movements can strain or sprain ligaments, muscles, or the joints between the spine and the pelvic bones (sacroiliac joints).

You can hurt a disc in your back the same way, causing it to bulge or tear (rupture). This is called a **herniated disc**. If the tear is large enough, the gel inside the disc may leak out and press against a nerve.

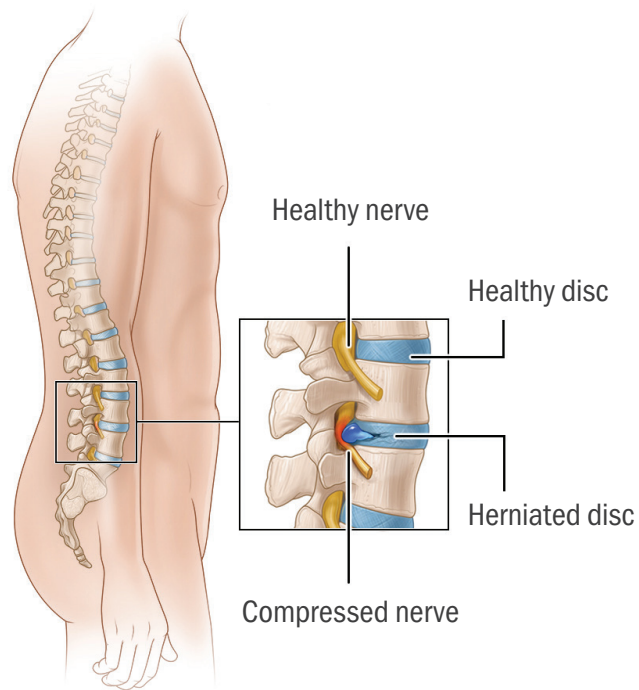
A sprain or strain often causes bad pain for 2 to 3 days, followed by slow healing and a gradual decrease in pain. Pain from a herniated disc may last longer. You may feel the pain in your low back, in one buttock, or down one leg.

With self-care, most of these back injuries will heal in 6 to 12 weeks.

Did you know?

Sciatica is an irritation of the sciatic nerve, which is formed by the nerve roots that come out of the spinal cord into the lower back. The nerve extends down through the buttock to the foot. Sciatica can occur when a damaged disc presses against a nerve root.

The main symptom is pain, numbness, or weakness that extends from your buttock down your leg.



A herniated disc can press on a nerve, causing pain.

Back pain can also be caused by problems that affect the bones and joints of the spine. Some of these develop as you get older.

For example:

- ▶ **Arthritis** pain may cause a steady ache, unlike the sharp, sudden pain of back strain or disc injuries.
- ▶ **Osteoporosis** can weaken the bones of the spine and cause them to break or collapse.

- ▶ **Spinal stenosis** is a narrowing of the spinal canal. This can squeeze and irritate the nerves that branch out from the spinal cord or irritate the spinal cord itself. This may cause pain, numbness, or weakness, most often in the legs, feet, and buttocks.

First aid for back pain

Keep moving

If you can, walk for 10 to 20 minutes at a time every 2 to 3 hours. Walk on level surfaces, not hills or stairs. Walk quickly if you can, and swing your arms as you walk.

Lying down for too long or sitting can make back pain worse. Change positions every 30 minutes. If you must sit for long periods of time, take breaks. Get up and walk, or lie flat to gently stretch your back.

Movement tips

- ▶ When a movement hurts, go gently.
- ▶ When moving into a lying-down position, keep your back straight.
- ▶ Don't sit up in bed to read or watch TV. Use your bed only for lying down.
- ▶ Sit on firm seating. Use armrests to lower and raise yourself.
- ▶ When you get up in the morning, wait 40 to 60 minutes before doing any vigorous exercise.

Try ice and heat

Put a heating pad or an ice pack on your back every 2 to 3 hours (heat for 15 to 20 minutes, ice for 10 to 15 minutes). Use whichever works for you. Or switch between ice and heat. If you use ice, put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.

Medicine for pain

Pain medicine can help with low back pain. For best results:

- ▶ Learn what the risks and side effects are before you take any pain medicine.
- ▶ Take pain medicine soon after the pain starts, on a regular schedule. Follow the instructions on the label.
- ▶ Don't take more than one kind of medicine unless your doctor has told you to.

For most low back pain, you can take over-the-counter pain medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve).

If you've been prescribed medicine for severe pain, carefully follow your doctor's advice.

Did you know?

Even though you hurt, bed rest is not best. Walking, stretching, and exercises can help you get better and may prevent future problems. Just go slow and try not to overdo it.



When to call a doctor

Most of the time you'll be able to handle low back pain at home. But there may be times when you need to call your doctor.

Call 911 if:

- ▶ Back pain occurs with chest pain or other symptoms of a heart attack.
- ▶ A person has signs of damage to the spine after an injury. Signs may include:
 - Being unable to move part of the body.
 - Severe back or neck pain.
 - Weakness, tingling, or numbness in the arms or legs.
 - You can't walk or stand at all because of weakness, not just because it hurts.

Call the doctor if:

- ▶ You suddenly lose bowel or bladder control.
- ▶ You have new numbness in the buttocks, genital or rectal area, or legs.
- ▶ You have leg weakness that is not solely due to pain. Many people with low back pain say their legs feel weak. See your doctor if your leg is so weak that you cannot bend your foot.
- ▶ You have new or increased back pain with fever, painful urination, or other signs of a urinary tract infection.
- ▶ You have long-term back pain that suddenly gets much worse, and you didn't cause it by being more active.
- ▶ You have a history of cancer or HIV infection, and you have new or increased back pain.
- ▶ You have severe pain that doesn't improve after a few days of home treatment.
- ▶ Pain wakes you from sleep.
- ▶ Pain does not improve after 2 weeks of home treatment.

Tests

Whether you've had back pain for a few weeks or you have pain that recently came back or that comes and goes, it's normal to feel like you need to know what's causing it.

If your back pain has lasted for less than 6 weeks, your doctor may hold off on testing. This is because most back pain goes away on its own in a month or so.

But if you have back pain that has lasted longer than 6 weeks, or if your doctor thinks it may be more than muscle pain, it might be time for a test.

Which tests are used?

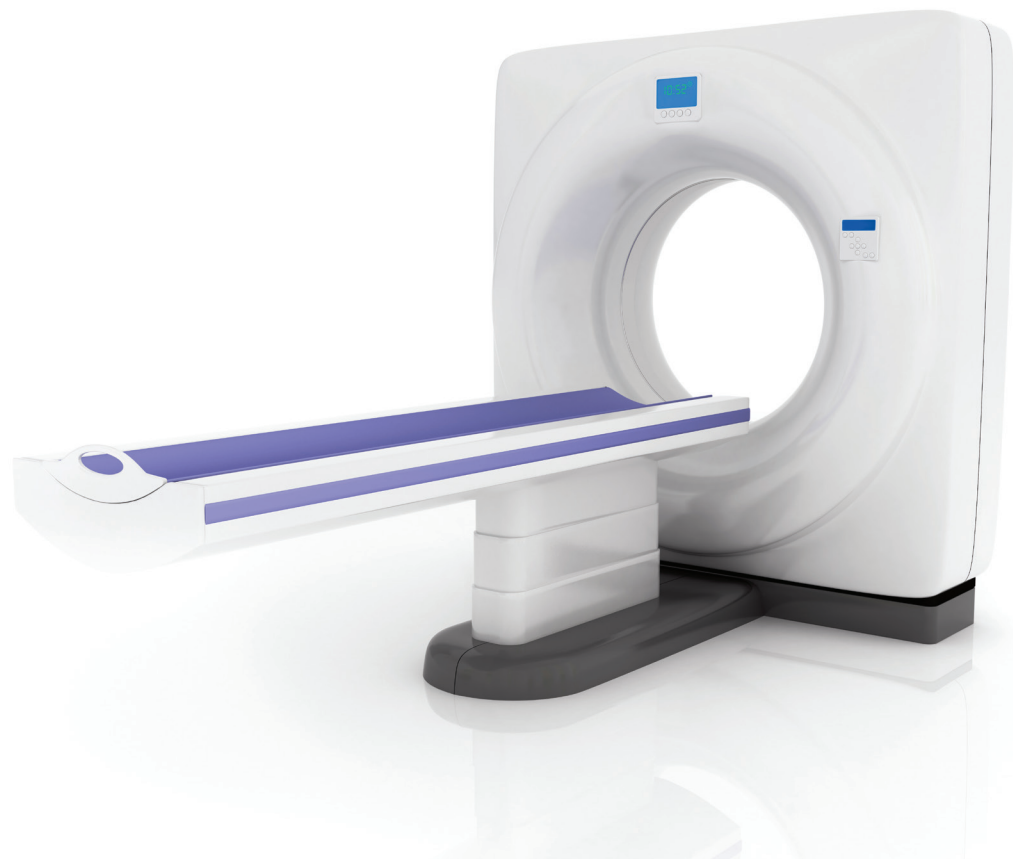
Tests for low back pain include:

- ▶ X-rays.
- ▶ MRIs.
- ▶ CT scans.

Sometimes other tests are useful, such as a bone scan or electromyogram and nerve conduction study. These tests look for bone, nerve, and muscle/nerve problems that might be causing low back pain.

Go to web

Thinking about having an MRI? For help deciding whether this is right for you, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/low-back-pain-aa6410>.





Taking care of yourself

Almost everyone has low back pain at some time. The good news is that most low back pain will go away in a few days or weeks with some basic self-care. Self-care can help relieve pain, promote healing, and prevent reinjury.

Some people are afraid that doing too much may make their pain worse. But in most cases, getting back to your normal activities is good for your back, as long as you avoid things that make your pain worse.

Ease into activity

- ▶ For the first day or two of pain, take it easy. But as soon as possible, get back to your normal activities.
- ▶ Get gentle exercise, such as walking. Movement keeps your spine flexible and helps your muscles stay strong.
- ▶ If you're an athlete, return to your activity carefully. Choose a low-impact option until your pain is under control.

Avoid or change activities that cause pain

- ▶ Try to avoid bending, lifting, or reaching. These movements put extra stress on your back.
- ▶ In bed, try lying on your side with a pillow between your knees. Or lie on your back on the floor with a pillow under your knees.
- ▶ When you sit, place a small pillow or a rolled-up towel in the curve of your back for extra support.
- ▶ Try putting one foot up on a stool or changing positions every few minutes if you have to stand still for a period of time.
- ▶ Don't bend over to put on pants or stockings. Instead, stand with your back against a wall. Then slide your shoulders down the wall and bring your knee up. Step into your pants or stockings, one leg at a time.

Use good posture and body mechanics

Body mechanics are the way you use your body. Posture is the way you sit or stand.

- ▶ Take extra care when you lift. See “Lifting” on page 10.
- ▶ Stand or sit tall without slumping or arching your back too much.

Build a healthy back

- ▶ Use your body in ways that reduce stress on your back.
- ▶ Stretch and strengthen your back.
- ▶ Practice good health habits. These include getting regular exercise, staying at a healthy weight, and not smoking.

Back pain and smoking

People who smoke take longer to heal—from any injury, not just back pain. If you stop smoking, you may feel better sooner.

People who smoke are also much more likely to have back pain than people who don’t smoke. Nicotine and other toxins from smoking can keep spinal discs from getting nutrients they need from the blood, making disc injury more likely.

Go to web

Thinking about quitting smoking? To learn more about how to quit for good, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/quitting-smoking-qtsmk>.



Using good body mechanics

The goal of good body mechanics is to sit, stand, sleep, and move in ways that reduce stress on your back. Use good body mechanics all the time, not just when you have back pain.

Sitting

- ▶ Try not to sit in the same position for more than an hour at a time. Get up or change positions every 20 to 30 minutes.
- ▶ If you work at a desk or computer, set up your workstation to reduce stress on your back and neck.
 - Use a chair that you can adjust and that doesn't upset the normal curve of your back.
 - Keep your feet flat on the floor or on a footrest.
 - Keep your screen at or just below eye level so you don't have to tilt your head or look sideways.
- ▶ If your chair doesn't give enough support, use a small pillow or rolled-up towel to support your lower back.
- ▶ When you drive, pull your seat forward so that you can easily reach the pedals and steering wheel. Stop often to stretch and walk around. A small pillow or rolled-up towel behind your lower back might help too.

Lifting

- ▶ Keep your upper back straight. Don't bend forward at the waist.
- ▶ Bend your knees, and let your arms and legs do the work. Tighten your buttocks and belly to support your back.
- ▶ Keep the load as close to your body as you can, even if the load is light.
- ▶ While holding a heavy object, use your feet to turn, not your back. Try not to turn or twist your body.
- ▶ Do not lift heavy objects above shoulder level.
- ▶ For heavy or awkward items, use a hand truck or ask someone to help you.

Lying down

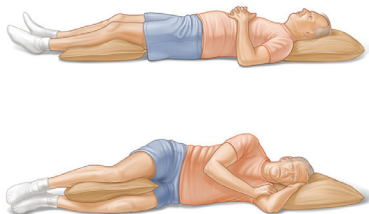
- ▶ If you have back pain at night, your mattress may be the problem. Try a firmer mattress. Or if you think your mattress is too firm, try a softer one.
- ▶ If you sleep on your back, you may want to use a rolled-up towel to support your lower back or put a pillow under your knees.
- ▶ If you sleep on your side, try placing a pillow between your knees.
- ▶ Sleeping on your stomach is fine if it doesn't cause back or neck pain.



Adjust your chair, keyboard, and screen to reduce back and neck stress.



When you lift heavy objects, keep your upper back straight, bend your knees, and keep the load close to your body.



Try placing a pillow between or under your knees to relieve back pain while lying in bed.

Exercises for your back

There's no proof that specific exercises can help prevent back pain, but the exercises described here are a practical way to help you stay strong and flexible. You may want to make them part of your fitness routine.

Do not do these exercises if you've just hurt your back. Instead, see "First aid for back pain" on page 5.

You do not need to do every exercise. Do the ones that help you the most. Start each exercise slowly. Ease off the exercise if you start to have pain. Don't do any exercise that makes the pain spread into your buttocks or legs, either during or after the exercise.

Curl-ups



1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
2. Cross your arms over your chest. If this bothers your neck, try putting your hands behind your neck (not your head), with your elbows spread apart.
3. Slowly tighten your belly muscles and raise your shoulder blades off the floor.
4. Keep your head in line with your body—don't press your chin to your chest.
5. Hold this position for 1 or 2 seconds, then slowly lower yourself back down to the floor.
6. Repeat 8 to 12 times.

Pelvic tilt exercise



1. Lie on your back with your knees bent.
2. “Brace” your stomach—tighten your muscles by pulling in and imagining your belly button moving toward your spine.
3. Press your lower back into the floor. You should feel your hips and pelvis rock back.
4. Hold for 6 seconds while breathing smoothly.
5. Relax and allow your pelvis and hips to rock forward.
6. Repeat 8 to 12 times.

Alternate arm and leg (bird dog) exercise



Note: Do this exercise slowly. Try to keep your body straight at all times, and do not let one hip drop lower than the other.

1. Start on the floor, on your hands and knees.
2. Tighten your belly muscles.
3. Raise one leg off the floor, and hold it straight out behind you. Be careful not to let your hip drop down, because that will twist your trunk.
4. Hold for about 6 seconds, then lower your leg and switch to the other leg.
5. Repeat 8 to 12 times on each leg.
6. Over time, work up to holding for 10 to 30 seconds each time.
7. If you feel stable and secure with your leg raised, try raising the opposite arm straight out in front of you at the same time.

Knee-to-chest exercise



1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. You can put a small pillow under your head and neck if it is more comfortable.
2. Bring one knee to your chest, keeping the other foot flat on the floor.
3. Keep your lower back pressed to the floor. Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds.
4. Relax, and lower the knee to the starting position.
5. Repeat with the other leg. Repeat 2 to 4 times with each leg.
6. To get more stretch, put your other leg flat on the floor while pulling your knee to your chest.

Press-up



1. Lie on your stomach, supporting your body with your forearms.
2. Press your elbows down into the floor to raise your upper back. As you do this, relax your stomach muscles and allow your back to arch without using your back muscles. As you press up, do not let your hips or pelvis come off the floor.
3. Hold for at least 15 to 30 seconds, then relax.
4. Repeat 2 to 4 times.

Bridging



1. Lie on your back with both knees bent. Your knees should be bent about 90 degrees.
2. Tighten your belly muscles by pulling in your belly button toward your spine.
3. Then push your feet into the floor, squeeze your buttocks, and lift your hips off the floor until your shoulders, hips, and knees are all in a straight line.
4. Hold for about 6 seconds as you continue to breathe normally, and then slowly lower your hips back down to the floor and rest for up to 10 seconds.
5. Repeat 8 to 12 times.

Hamstring stretch in doorway



1. Lie on your back in a doorway, with one leg through the open door.
2. Slide your other leg up the wall to straighten your knee. You should feel a gentle stretch down the back of your leg.
 - Do not arch your back.
 - Do not bend either knee.
 - Keep one heel touching the floor and the other heel touching the wall. Do not point your toes.
3. Hold the stretch for at least 1 minute to begin. Then try to lengthen the time you hold the stretch for as long as 6 minutes.
4. Repeat 2 to 4 times with each leg.

Hip flexor stretch



1. Kneel on one leg and bend your other leg out in front of you, with that foot flat on the floor. If you feel discomfort in the front of your knee, place a towel under your knee.
2. Keeping your back straight, slowly push your hips forward until you feel a stretch in the upper thigh of your back leg and hip.
3. Hold the stretch for at least 15 to 30 seconds.
4. Repeat 2 to 4 times with each leg.

Back press



1. Place your feet 10 to 12 inches from the wall.
2. Rest your back flat against the wall, and slide down the wall until your knees are slightly bent.
3. Press your lower back against the wall by pulling in your stomach muscles.
4. Hold for about 6 seconds, and then relax your stomach muscles and slide back up the wall.
5. Repeat 8 to 12 times.

Ways to do daily tasks with less pain

Housecleaning

- ▶ Don't strain to reach. Try using a damp cloth on the end of a broomstick to reach low places. Or buy mops and other tools that have arms that expand.
- ▶ Instead of pushing and pulling the vacuum, walk it all the way across the room and back. Stand up straight as you move.

Using the phone

- ▶ Don't hold a phone between your ear and your shoulder. If you can't hold the phone in your hand, use earbuds, a headset, or the speaker.

Driving

- ▶ To get in, sit first and then turn so that you bring both legs into the car together. To get out, do the reverse.
- ▶ Pull your seat forward so that you can comfortably reach the pedals and the steering wheel. Your knees should be bent so that you don't have to lift your whole leg to step on the brake.
- ▶ Try driving with a small pillow or rolled-up towel behind your lower back.

In the bathroom

- ▶ Install support bars by the bathtub and toilet to help you put less strain on your back as you get in and out or up and down.
- ▶ If you shave your legs, put a small stool in the shower. Place your foot on the stool as you shave.

Standing chores

- ▶ For chores that require standing in one place, try placing one foot slightly higher than the other. For example, when doing dishes, open the cupboard below and place your foot on the ledge. Or stack one or two books on the floor and put one foot on them. Remember to squat when putting those books on the floor.

Picking up children

- ▶ Try to avoid picking up a child while you're standing up. If you must, remember to lift properly.
- ▶ Better yet, find a place to sit down and let the child come into your lap.

Gardening

- ▶ Many gardening chores require bending forward. Whenever you can, sit, squat, or kneel instead.

Unloading groceries

- ▶ Don't try to take in all the groceries at once. Instead, get extra exercise by making several trips between the car and the kitchen.

Treatment

A wide range of treatment is available for low back pain, depending on what's causing the pain and how long it lasts. Chances are good that your pain will improve within a few weeks with some basic self-care. Other treatments can help too.

Go to web

Not sure if you want to try spinal manipulation? For help making this decision, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/low-back-pain-tu6488>.

Physical therapy

The goal of physical therapy is to make daily tasks and activities easier. For example, it may help with walking, going up stairs, or getting in and out of bed.

First, your physical therapist will try to reduce your pain and swelling. Then he or she will probably work to increase your flexibility, strength, and endurance.

Physical therapy can include stretching, core exercises, weight lifting, and walking. You may learn an exercise program you can do at home.

Your physical therapist also may use manual therapy (such as massage or spinal manipulation), education, and techniques such as heat, cold, and ultrasound.

Spinal manipulation

Spinal manipulation helps relieve short-term low back pain for many people. It doesn't work for everyone.

Manipulation can be done with the hands or a special device. The careful, controlled force used on the joint can range from gentle to strong, and from slow to quick.

If you have tight muscles or muscles that spasm, your practitioner may first use heat, ultrasound, or an electrical current to relax your muscles before manipulating the spine.

Many types of practitioners use spinal manipulation, such as chiropractors, osteopathic physicians, physical therapists, and physiatrists.



Surgery

When you're in a lot of pain, you might wonder if you need surgery to fix what's wrong.

Every case is different. But most people don't need surgery for low back pain.

Most back surgeries are done to treat nerve pain from herniated discs. But most herniated discs heal and the pain eases after a few weeks or months of non-surgical treatment.

When surgery may help

Surgery might be an option when a disc problem causes pain in your leg that prevents you from doing everyday tasks. You may have pain, numbness, or tingling through one buttock and down the back of one leg (sciatica) or in

the front of your thigh. Other problems that may require surgery include:

- ▶ A spinal fracture caused by an injury.
- ▶ An infection in your spine.
- ▶ A problem that causes your spine to be unstable.
- ▶ A tumor in your spine.
- ▶ Spinal stenosis.
- ▶ Loss of feeling or weakness in your back or legs that gets worse over time.
- ▶ Loss of bowel or bladder control.

Having surgery for a herniated disc or another back problem is a big decision. Talk to your doctor about it.

Go to web

If you have a herniated disc and want help deciding whether surgery is right for you, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/lumbar-herniated-disc-aa6282>.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture may help some people who have low back pain. Acupuncture is a form of Chinese medicine based on the theory that energy flows through and around your body along pathways called meridians.

In acupuncture, very thin needles are put into your skin at certain points. This is done to affect the energy flow. Sometimes heat, pressure, or a mild electrical current is used along with needles.

Managing pain

The best way to control your pain is to follow your treatment plan and give it time to work.

Some treatments may take a few days or weeks to improve your pain. You and your doctor can talk about how long you should stay on a medicine or other treatment.

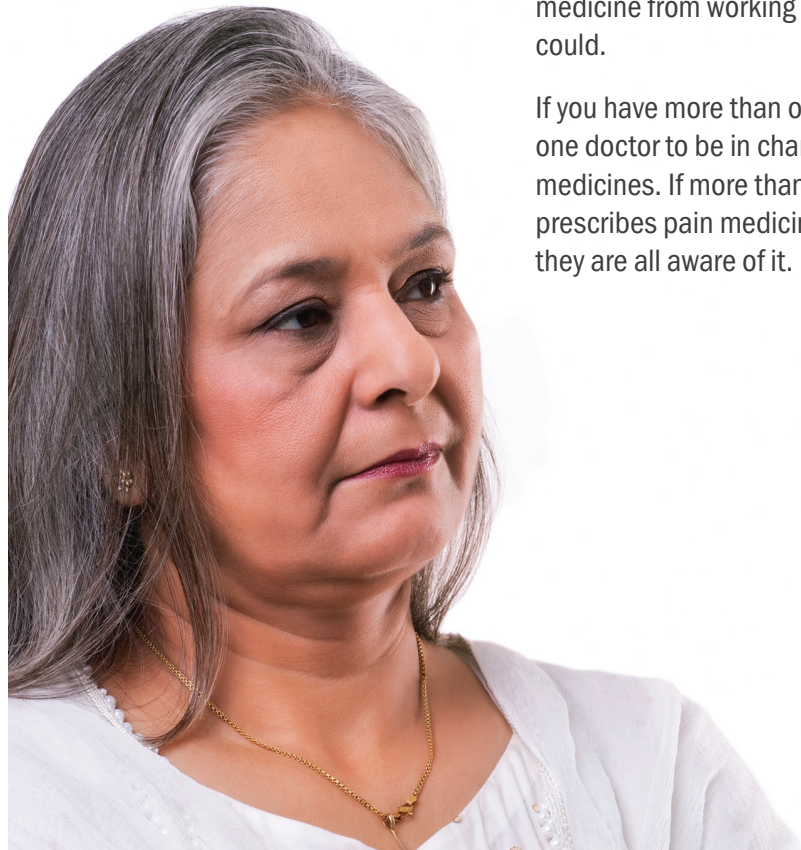
It's very important to take your medicines exactly as your doctor prescribes. This will help you get the right amount of medicine with as few side effects as possible.

Make sure to tell your doctor about any medicines or herbal supplements you take. They could mix in a bad way with your pain medicine or keep the pain medicine from working as well as it could.

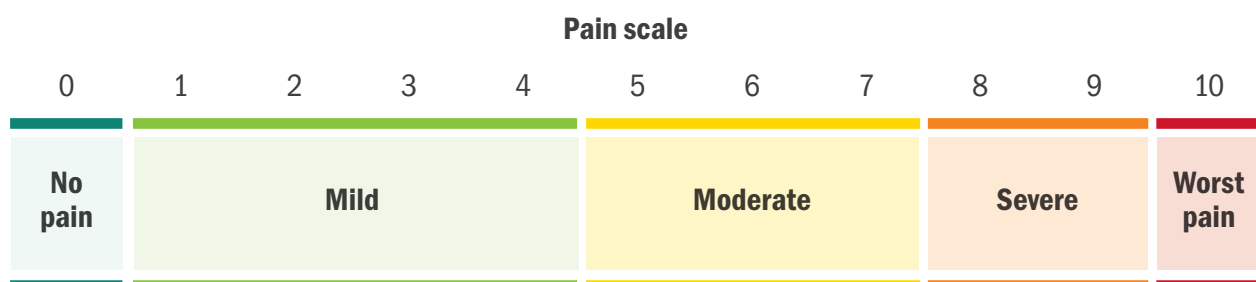
If you have more than one doctor, pick one doctor to be in charge of all your medicines. If more than one doctor prescribes pain medicine, make sure they are all aware of it.

Keep a pain diary

A pain diary may help you and your doctor find out what makes your pain better or worse. Use a daily diary like the one on the next page to keep track of when you have pain, how bad it is, and what you're doing to treat it. It'll also help you and your doctor know if a medicine is working for you.



Daily pain diary



Date, time:

.....
Pain scale rating:

.....
Medicine and dose:

.....
Medicine side effects:

.....
What made the pain better today?

.....
What made the pain worse today?

Stress and your back

Stress is what you feel when you have too much to handle. You may have too much work to do, or you may have trouble at home. If stress happens too often or lasts too long, it can affect your health.

Go to web

Tense muscles can cause back pain. Progressive muscle relaxation is a series of exercises you can try to help relieve muscle tension.

To learn more, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/stress-management-uz2225>.

We all “hold” stress in different ways. Some people hold stress in their minds. They may worry so much that they can’t think clearly.

If you hold stress in your body, it can affect your back. You may tense your back muscles, which can trigger low back pain or make it worse.

Stress and low back pain can create a vicious circle. You have back pain, and you begin to worry about it. This causes stress, and your back muscles get tense. Tense muscles make your back pain worse, and so on.

Reduce stress

You’ll always have some stress in your life, but you can try to prevent situations that cause stress and change how stress affects you.

Time management

When you don’t have time, things pile up and stress mounts. To manage your time:

- ▶ Focus on what you’re doing. Don’t try to do too many tasks at the same time. Break large projects into smaller ones.
- ▶ Don’t try to do everything yourself. Ask others to help.
- ▶ Rate tasks by how important and urgent they are. Spend your time on things that rate high.
- ▶ Plan your day so you have time for something you want to do.
- ▶ Use the 3 Ds: Deal with it, delegate it, or dump it.

Healthy lifestyle

Some lifestyle choices can help your body bounce back from stress.

- ▶ Get enough sleep. Your body recovers from stress while you sleep.
- ▶ Eat healthy foods. And when you eat, sit down and relax. Avoid too much caffeine.
- ▶ Be active every day. Go for walks or work in the garden.
- ▶ Don't smoke.

If you have a lot of stress, ask for help. Look for support from:

- ▶ Family members and friends.
- ▶ People at work or school.
- ▶ Members of your church or religious group.
- ▶ Support groups. You can find groups in your area or online.
- ▶ Programs such as stress management or time management courses.

Managing your weight

Extra weight, especially around the waist, may put strain on your back. To get to a healthy weight and stay there, lifestyle changes work better than dieting. To reach a healthy weight:

- ▶ **Improve your eating habits.** Do it slowly. You'll be more successful if you work on one eating habit at a time.
- ▶ **Get moving.** Make physical activity a regular part of your day, like brushing your teeth. Start small and build up over time. Talk to your doctor before you start exercising.
- ▶ **Change your thinking.** Try to notice and stop negative thoughts. If you can choose more helpful thoughts, you may be surprised at how much healthier you feel—in mind and body.

Go to web

Want to reach a healthier weight? To get started, go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/weight-management-aa122915>.



Preventing future back pain

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Core stabilization is the general term for how the muscles of your trunk keep your spine and body stable. Want to learn how to build a stronger, more stable core? Go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/fitness-zt1226>.

After you've had low back pain once, you're likely to have it again. To avoid further pain:

- ▶ Practice good posture when you sit, stand, and walk.
- ▶ Get regular, low-impact exercise. Walk, swim, or ride a stationary bike. Stretch before you exercise.
- ▶ If you smoke, try to quit. People who smoke are more likely to have low back pain.
- ▶ Wear low-heeled shoes with good support.
- ▶ Watch your weight. Being too heavy puts extra stress on your back.
- ▶ Don't try to lift things that are too heavy. When you must lift, use good body mechanics. See "Lifting" page 10.

If you sit or stand for long periods at work:

- ▶ Pay attention to your posture. Sit or stand up straight, with your shoulders back.
- ▶ Use a chair that has good back support.
- ▶ Take regular breaks to walk around.

If your work involves a lot of bending, reaching, or lifting:

- ▶ Ask your supervisor if there are other ways you can do your work.
- ▶ Don't depend on a "back belt" to protect your back. Studies have not shown these belts to be effective in reducing back injuries.



Your plan for a healthy lifestyle change

When you want to change a habit, it helps to have a plan. Use this form to write down your ideas for making a change, getting around barriers, and finding support.

Step 1: Think about your reason for making a change.

My reason:

What do you want to achieve? Why is it important to you? Having your own reason can help motivate you.

Step 2: Set your long-term goal.

Long-term goal:

Based on your answers in step 1, set your long-term goal. This is what you want to accomplish overall.

Step 3: Set your short-term goals.

Short-term goals:

Based on your long-term goal, figure out the small steps you can work on each week that will build up to the outcome you want.

Step 4: Plan for your barriers.

I think my barriers will be:

You may already know what's going to get in the way of reaching your goal. Write down these problems (cost? time?), and think of ways to get around them. Use another sheet of paper if you need to.

I can get around them by:

Step 5: Find support, and reward yourself.

I will get support from:

Who can help you meet your goals? Family? Friends? An online or community support group?

My rewards:

Write down some rewards you can give yourself when you meet various goals. Rewards can be anything: a movie, a meal at your favorite restaurant, or an hour in the day all to yourself.

Coping and support

Go to web

Healthy thinking is a way to help you stay well or cope with a health problem by changing how you think. Want to learn how to change your thinking for the better? Go to <https://www.cigna.com/individuals-families/health-wellness/hw/medical-topics/stop-negative-thoughts-uf9857>.

Low back pain can take a toll on your mental health.

You may feel fear, frustration, and anger or have depression and anxiety because of ongoing pain. Those reactions can make your pain last even longer.

If pain is starting to get you down:

- ▶ Ask family members or friends to help with tasks you can't do right now.
- ▶ Be honest with your doctor about how pain is affecting you. Ask to be referred to a counselor or pain management specialist. Your doctor may also prescribe medicine for anxiety or depression.
- ▶ Work with your health professionals and your work supervisor to make a return-to-work plan, if necessary. Ask for an ergonomic consultation if you need to learn how to do some of your job duties differently to avoid hurting your back again.



Robert's story

“Just keep moving, even if it’s only a few steps.” For Robert, this is the key to helping his back pain.

Over the years, Robert has learned that getting active helps. A lot.

When his back went out 3 years ago, he went to a chiropractor.

“He got me to do strengthening exercises for my abs and lower back,” Robert says.

Robert hasn't been to the chiropractor since then, not even after he hurt his back lifting a heavy box last summer.

“I started out with icing my back and then switched between ice and heat.

Plus, I did the exercises that the chiropractor had given me,” Robert says. “On day three, I started walking. And then I really recovered quickly.”

Now his goal is to do his exercises every morning before breakfast and to take a half-hour walk every evening. But if he doesn't feel like it, he doesn't get mad at himself.

“If I feel like skipping the exercises, I tell myself I'll just do one and then go downstairs and eat. Usually I'll keep going until I've finished.”

He does the same thing with his evening walk. “I tell myself I only have to walk to the end of the block. And most times I keep going.”

This story is based on information gathered from many people facing this health issue.



When you have low back pain, it's important to plan ahead for what to do if your symptoms get worse. Work with your doctor to make a plan.

Symptom action plan

Name:

Doctor's name:

Doctor's phone number:

Other emergency contact numbers:

Next doctor visit date:

Questions for my doctor:

When should I call my doctor?

Call 911 if:

List of my medicines:

When to take my medicines:

What do I do if my symptoms get worse?

What do I need to check or keep track of? (such as weight or symptom changes)

Do I need to change my diet or activities? If so, what changes do I need to make?