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# A Guide for Back Pain

## Risk Factors

**Age:** Back pain is more common with age, especially after the age of 45.

**Stress level:** Poor sleep, depression, or anxiety can contribute to more frequent and severe back pain.

**Level of activity:** Back pain is common in people who do not get regular exercise, or in people who over do it and exercise too much.

**Weight:** Obesity increases the stress placed on the back.

**Job-related activity:** Jobs that require manual labor may contribute to injuring the back, as well as desk jobs that require you to sit for an extended period of time with poor posture and/or in an uncomfortable chair.

## Prevention

**Maintain a healthy weight:** Excess weight can overstrain your back.

**Perform regular exercise:** Exercises that train your balance and core strength will reduce your risk of falling and injuring your back. Yoga, tai-chi, and weighted exercises that improve balance are a good start.

**Eat a healthy diet** that has enough calcium and vitamin-D. These nutrients help keep your spine strong.

**Practice good posture** by not slouching and remembering to support your back while sitting or standing.

**Try to avoid lifting heavy items.** If you do have to lift a heavy item, **focus on lifting with your legs and core muscles** to decrease the stress on your spine.

## Causes

**Mechanical or Structural Issues:** Pain can occur if you sprain the ligaments that support the spine, or by straining a muscle or tendon in your back. Narrowing of the spinal canal (spinal stenosis) can put pressure on the spinal chord and nerves causing pain and discomfort. Disk degeneration can increase pressure on the nerves, leading to pain. Fracture or misaligned vertebrae can also cause pain.

**Inflammatory conditions:** Different types of inflammatory arthritis in the spine can contribute to pain.

**Other medical conditions:** Back pain can also be caused by infections, other conditions such as kidney stones or endometriosis, and, in rare cases, cancer.

## Who treats back pain?

**Your family or primary care doctor** can help you manage your back pain.

**Physical therapists** that specialize in mobility and strengthening of muscles.

**Physiatrists** which focus on diseases and disorders of the spine, brain and nerves.

**Rheumatologists** that treat autoimmune and musculoskeletal diseases.

**Surgeons** such as an **orthopedic spine surgeon** or a **neurosurgeon** that focuses on spinal surgery.

**Pain specialists**, which include anesthesiologists, are experts in the diagnosis and treatment of all different types of pain.

## Treatments

**Cold or hot packs** can promote healing in the back's tissues. **Limiting pain causing activities.** **Physical therapy**, can help strengthen your back muscles and provide relief. **Healthy habits** such as regular exercise, relaxation, regular sleep, a healthy diet, and not smoking, can reduce pain.

**Medications** such as over-the-counter pain relievers, oral anti-inflammatory drugs, muscle relaxants, anti-inflammatory injections, and prescription pain relievers for severe cases.

**Surgery** may be suggested by your provider if all other treatments are unsuccessful. There are many surgical treatments, so it is important to discuss with your provider which options are right for you.

**Disclaimer:** Med Ed Materials, 2024. This information is intended to supplement, not contradict, the medical advice of your practitioner.

For questions or more info, contact your practitioner.

**Source:** <https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/back-pain>