

Low back pain

Also called: lumbago

A common, painful condition affecting the lower portion of the spine.

Very common

More than 3 million US cases per year



Usually self-treatable



Usually self-diagnosable



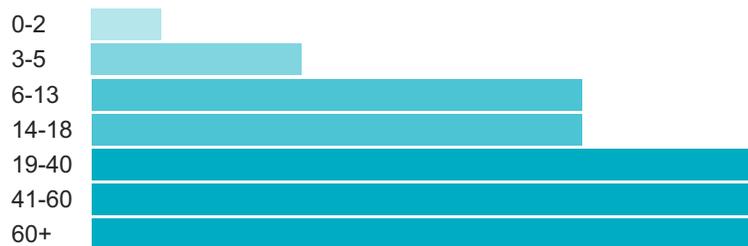
Lab tests or imaging rarely required

Low back pain is caused by injury to a muscle (strain) or ligament (sprain). Common causes include improper lifting, poor posture, lack of regular exercise, fracture, ruptured disk, or arthritis.

Often, the only symptom is pain in the lower back.

Most low back pain goes away on its own in two to four weeks. Physical therapy and pain relievers can help. A few cases may require surgery.

Ages affected



Symptoms

Usually self-diagnosable

Often, the only symptom is pain in the lower back.

People may experience:

Pain areas: in the back, muscles and bones, hip, or leg

Sensory: leg numbness or pins and needles

Also common: back joint dysfunction or muscle spasms

Treatments

Treatment consists of pain medications

Most low back pain goes away on its own in two to four weeks. Physical therapy and pain relievers can help. A few cases may require surgery.

Medications

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug: Relieves pain, decreases inflammation, and reduces fever.

- Ibuprofen (Advil, Children's Profen IB, Children's Ibu-Drops, I-Prin, and Motrin IB)
- Naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn, Ec-Naprosyn, Midol (naproxen), and Mediproxen)
- Ketorolac (Acuvail, Sprix, Acular, and Acular LS)
- Aspirin (Bayer Aspirin, Ecotrin, Effervescent Antacid, E.C. Prin, and Bayer Advanced)

Analgesic: Relieves pain.

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol, Mapap, Feverall, Acephen, and Nortemp)

Muscle relaxant: Reduces muscle tension and helps relieve muscle pain and discomfort.

- Carisoprodol (Soma)
- Cyclobenzaprine (Amrix and Fexmid)
- Methocarbamol (Robaxin and Robaxin-750)
- Metaxalone (Skelaxin and Metaxall)

Narcotic: Relieves pain, dulls the senses, and causes drowsiness. May become addictive.

- Tramadol (Ultram, ConZip, and Ultram ER)

Self-care

Heating pad: Soothes painful muscles or joints and can help drain skin infections.

Physical exercise: Aerobic activity for 20-30 minutes 5 days a week improves cardiovascular health. If injured, pursuing an activity that avoids the injured muscle group or joint can help maintain physical function while recovering.

Therapies

Joint manipulation: Stretching a joint past its current restricted range of motion to restore movement and reduce pain.

Stretching: Stretching exercises can improve flexibility and improve physical function.

Physical therapy: Restores muscle strength and function through exercise.

Massage: Relaxes tense muscles.

Acupuncture: Insertion of needles into specific points on the body to relieve pain and treat other conditions. A form of traditional Chinese medicine.

Medical procedure

Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation: Applying a small electrical current to a part of the body to dull the sensation of pain.

Epidural steroid injection: Injection of cortisone and a numbing agent into the spine. Can relieve back, neck, arm, and leg pain.

Specialists

Primary care provider (PCP): Prevents, diagnoses, and treats diseases.

Orthopedic surgeon: Performs surgery for conditions affecting bones and muscles.

Spine surgeon: Performs surgery on the spine.

Pain management: Eases suffering and improves quality of life for those in pain.

Emergency medicine doctor: Treats patients in the emergency department.

Consult a doctor for medical advice

Note: The information you see describes what usually happens with a medical condition, but doesn't apply to everyone. This information isn't medical advice, so make sure to contact a healthcare provider if you have a medical problem. If you think you may have a medical

emergency, call your doctor or a emergency number immediately.

Sources: Mayo Clinic and others. [Learn more](#)