

Low Back Pain (General)

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What Is Low Back Pain?

Low back pain refers to pain, stiffness, or discomfort in the lower part of the spine (lumbar region). It is one of the most common musculoskeletal conditions and can range from mild to severe.

Common Symptoms

- Aching, sharp, dull, or burning pain in the lower back
- Muscle tightness or stiffness
- Pain that stays in the low back or spreads into the buttocks or legs
- Numbness, tingling, or “pins and needles” if a nerve is irritated
- Difficulty bending, lifting, standing, or sitting for long periods

What Causes Low Back Pain?

Most low back pain is **not caused by a serious disease** and often comes from irritation of muscles, joints, discs, or surrounding tissues. Possible sources include:

- Muscle or ligament strain
- Joint irritation (facet or sacroiliac joints)
- Disc irritation or bulging
- Nerve irritation (“pinched nerve”)
- Poor posture or repetitive stress
- Weakness or lack of core stability

Types of Low Back Pain

Low back pain is generally grouped into three categories:

1. **Serious Conditions (Rare)** - Includes fracture, infection, tumor, or severe nerve compression. These require urgent medical care.
2. **Nerve-Related Pain** - Pain that may travel into the buttock or leg and may include numbness or tingling.
3. **Mechanical (Most Common)** - Pain from muscles, joints, discs, or ligaments. This makes up the majority of low back pain cases.

Stages of Low Back Pain

- **Acute (0–6 weeks):** Focus on reducing pain and restoring movement
- **Subacute (6–12 weeks):** Improve function and strength
- **Chronic (12+ weeks):** Build long-term strength, endurance, and stability

How Is It Diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on your symptoms, medical history, and physical examination. Imaging such as X-rays or MRI is not usually needed unless symptoms are severe, persistent, or suggest a more serious condition.

Treatment

- Staying active and avoiding prolonged bed rest
- Chiropractic adjustments and manual therapy
- Stretching and strengthening exercises
- Core stabilization exercises
- Soft tissue therapy or massage
- Heat or ice therapy
- Electrical stimulation (in some cases)

Other Treatment Options

- Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications
- Muscle relaxers (short-term use only when needed)
- Injections for specific conditions
- Surgery (rare, only when conservative care fails or serious conditions are present)

Prognosis

- Most people (**80–90%**) improve within a few weeks with conservative care
- Most individuals will have recurring episodes
- A smaller percentage may develop long-term (chronic) symptoms
- Staying active and following an exercise program improves long-term outcomes

Typical Duration of Care

- More frequent visits in the first few weeks (about 2-3 visits per week in acute cases)
- Gradual reduction in visits as symptoms improve
- Transition to a home exercise and self-management program for long-term results

When to Seek Immediate Medical Attention

Seek urgent care if you experience:

- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Severe or worsening weakness in the legs
- Numbness in the groin or inner thighs (“saddle anesthesia”)
- Severe pain after major trauma
- Fever with back pain

Key Point - Most low back pain is not dangerous and improves with movement, guided care, and time.