

Facts about back pain problems

Back pain is one of the most common physical complaints amongst adults and a main cause of misery for many. At some point in their lives, most people will experience some sort of back pain.

Back pain describes pain or discomfort felt in the upper, middle, or lower back. The pain may extend to the hips and legs. The back consists of a complex arrangement of bones, ligaments, joints, muscles, and nerves, and pain can result from a problem with any of these components.

The most common type of back pain is low back pain. This is due to the fact that the lower portion of the back is under the most pressure when a person is sitting or lifting, and it can be easily damaged.

There are many causes of back pain.

- The most common cause is a strain of the back, which is a small tear of the back muscles or ligaments. This usually results from a sudden or awkward movement, or from lifting a heavy object. Often, a person can't remember a particular incident that brought on the pain.
- Other common causes include poor muscle tone in the back, tension or spasm of the back muscles, and problems with the joints that make up the back.
- A herniated disc can pinch a nerve as it leaves the spine.
- Whiplash injury (associated with neck pain) most commonly occurs following an auto accident. This is typically caused by hyperextension and/or hyperflexion because the head is forced to move backward and/or forward rapidly beyond the neck's normal range of motion.

Back pain can be classified as either:

- Acute - sudden pain that lasts for just a short while, usually a few days to a few weeks.
- Chronic - pain that lasts for more than three months or pain that recurs

Statistics show that with non-invasive treatment, up to 90% of people with acute back pain improve within one month and up to 60% improve within a week. Even severe back pain due to a herniated disc often resolves within six weeks of treatment, as the protruding discs begin to shrink.

Fortunately, most cases of acute low back pain improve quickly - within a few weeks, and in some cases, within a few days. In less than 5% of people, the pain persists and becomes chronic.