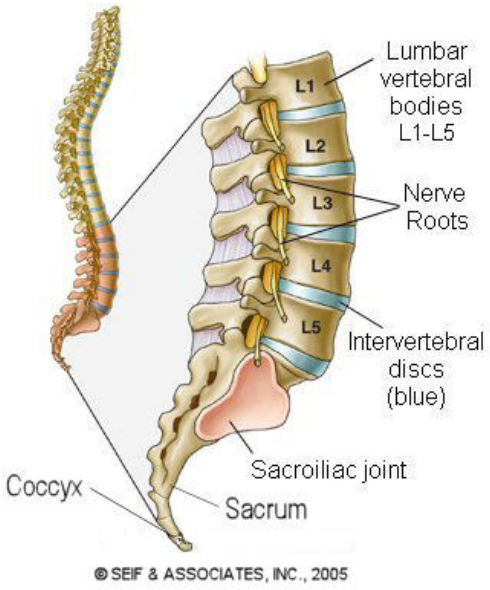
# Back Pain (Lumbosacral Strain)

Back pain is one of the most common causes of pain. There are many causes of back pain. Most are not serious conditions.

## CAUSES

Your backbone (*spinal column*) is made up of 24 main vertebral bodies, the sacrum, and the coccyx. These are held together by muscles and tough, fibrous tissue (*ligaments*). Nerve roots pass through the openings between the vertebrae. A sudden move or injury to the back may cause injury to, or pressure on, these nerves. This may result in localized back pain or pain movement (*radiation*) into the buttocks, down the leg, and into the foot. Sharp, shooting pain from the buttock down the back of the leg (*sciatica*) is frequently associated with a ruptured (*herniated*) disc. Pain may be caused by muscle spasm alone.




Your caregiver can often find the cause of your pain by the details of your symptoms and an exam. In some cases, you may need tests (such as X-rays). Your caregiver will work with you to decide if any tests are needed based on your specific exam.

## HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- **Avoid an underactive lifestyle. Active exercise, as directed by your caregiver, is your greatest weapon against back pain.**
- Avoid hard physical activities (tennis, racquetball, water-skiing) if you are not in proper physical condition for it. This may aggravate and/or create problems.
- If you have a back problem, avoid sports requiring sudden body movements. Swimming and walking are generally safer activities.
- Maintain good posture.
- Avoid becoming overweight (*obese*).
- Use bed rest for only the most extreme, sudden (*acute*) episode. Your caregiver will help you determine how much bed rest is necessary.
- For acute conditions, you may put ice on the injured area.
  - Put ice in a plastic bag.
  - Place a towel between your skin and the bag.
  - Leave the ice on for 30 minutes at a time, every 2 hours, or as needed.
- After you are improved and more active, it may help to apply heat for 30 minutes before activities.

See your caregiver if you are having pain that lasts longer than expected. Your caregiver can advise appropriate exercises and/or therapy if needed. With conditioning, most back problems can be avoided.

## SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have numbness, tingling, weakness, or problems with the use of your arms or legs.
- You experience severe back pain not relieved with medicines.
- There is a change in bowel or bladder control.
- You have increasing pain in any area of the body, including your belly (*abdomen*).
- You notice shortness of breath, dizziness, or feel faint.
- You feel sick to your stomach (*nauseous*), are throwing up (*vomiting*), or become sweaty.
- You notice discoloration of your toes or legs, or your feet get very cold.
- Your back pain is getting worse.

- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.

**MAKE SURE YOU:**

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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