Back Pain - Chronic

Back pain seldom lasts longer than 3 months. Long standing back pain can be caused by a ruptured disc. About half the time the exact cause cannot be found. Arthritis, osteoporosis, tumors, infections, previous back surgery, and other causes may be involved. Anxiety and depression are common factors.

A ruptured disc often causes sciatica. This is a pain traveling from the low back down the back of the leg. This is due to irritation of the sciatic nerve. **Weakness or numbness in the legs or feet and loss of normal bladder control are more serious signs of disc rupture. You should contact your doctor immediately if these symptoms** develop.

Avoid bending, heavy lifting, prolonged sitting, and activities which make the problem worse. Continue normal activity as much as possible. Take brief periods of rest throughout the day to reduce your pain during bad periods. A back exercise rehabilitation program can be helpful in reducing symptoms and preventing more pain. Muscle relaxants are sometimes used. Using narcotic pain medicine for long term pain is discouraged. Addiction is a possible outcome.

Surgery is considered only when symptoms do not improve with bed rest and other conservative treatment. You should see your caregiver if problems get worse.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have marked weakness or numbness in one of your legs.
- You have trouble controlling your bladder or bowels.
- You develop nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, shortness of breath or fainting.
- You have severe pain not relieved with medications.

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