

# BACK PAIN, LOW

## TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

# 3.3

### DESCRIPTION

Pain in the lower back usually caused by muscle strain. It is often accompanied by sciatica (pain that radiates from the back to the buttock and down into the leg). Onset of pain may be immediate or occur some hours after exertion or an injury. The symptoms get into a cycle, starting with a muscle spasm, the spasm then causes pain and the pain results in additional muscle spasm.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Pain may be continuous or occur when you are in a certain position. The pain may be aggravated by coughing, sneezing, bending, or twisting.
- Stiffness

### CAUSES

- Exertion or lifting
- Severe blow or fall
- Back disorders
- Infections
- Ruptured lumbar disk
- Nerve dysfunction
- Osteoporosis
- Tumors
- Spondylosis (hardening and stiffening of the spinal column)
- Congenital problem
- Childbirth

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Biomechanical risk factors and improper lifting
- Sedentary occupations
- Gardening and other yard work
- Sports and exercise participation, especially if infrequent
- Obesity

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Exercises to strengthen lower back muscles  
Learn how to lift heavy objects  
Sit properly  
Back support in bed  
Lose weight, if obese  
Choose proper footwear

## Student Health Center

# WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

Use special back support devices

Carry back packs over both shoulders

Stop smoking - smoking is associated with degenerative disc disease

### EXPECTED OUTCOME

Recovery is gradual, but backaches tend to recur.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Chronic low back pain

### GENERAL MEASURES

Diagnostic tests are rarely indicated in the first month following a back injury. Bed rest for first 24 hours may be indicated. Recent medical studies indicate that staying more active is better for back disorders than prolonged bed rest. Use a firm mattress (place a bed board under the mattress if needed). Ice pack or cold massage or heat applied to affected area with heating pad or hot water bottle. Physical therapy. Massage may help. Be sure person is well-trained or massage could cause more harm than help. Wear a special back support device. Other options are available depending on degree of injury, such as surgery (if disk damaged), electrical nerve stimulation, acupuncture, special shoes, etc.

### MEDICATION

Mild pain medications such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

Stronger pain medicine or a muscle relaxant may be prescribed. Note: Medications do not hasten healing; they only help to reduce symptoms.

### ACTIVITY & DIET

Try to continue with daily work or school schedules to the extent possible. Use care in resuming normal activities.

Avoid strenuous activity for 6 weeks. After healing, an exercise program will help prevent re-injury. No special diet. A weight reduction diet is recommended if obesity is a problem.

### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- You have mild, low back pain that persists for 3 to 4 days after self-treatment.
- New or unexplained symptoms appear. Medications used in treatment may cause side effects.
- Urinary or bowel symptoms accompanying pain.
- Back pain is severe or recurrent.

Sports Medicine and Physical Therapy can provide strengthening exercises.



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Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.