



CARE INSTRUCTIONS

KAISER PERMANENTE

Back Pain: After Your Visit

Your Kaiser Permanente Care Instructions



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Back pain has many possible causes. It is often related to problems with muscles and ligaments of the back. It may also be related to problems with the nerves, discs, or bones of the back. Moving, lifting, standing, sitting, or sleeping in an awkward way can strain the back. Sometimes you do not notice the injury until later. Arthritis is another common cause of back pain.

Although it may hurt a lot, back pain usually improves on its own within several weeks. Most people recover in 12 weeks or less. Using good home treatment and being careful not to stress your back can help you feel better sooner.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

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How can you care for yourself at home?

- Sit or lie in positions that are most comfortable and reduce your pain. Try one of these positions when you lie down:
 - Lie on your back with your knees bent and supported by large pillows.
 - Lie on the floor with your legs on the seat of a sofa or chair.
 - Lie on your side with your knees and hips bent and a pillow between your legs.
 - Lie on your stomach if it does not make pain worse.
- Do not sit up in bed, and avoid soft couches and twisted positions. Bed rest can help relieve pain at first, but it delays healing. Avoid bed rest after the first day.
- Change positions every 30 minutes. If you must sit for long periods of time, take breaks from sitting. Get up and walk around, or lie in a comfortable position.
- For the first 2 or 3 days, put ice or cold packs on your back for 10 to 20 minutes at a time, several times a day. (Put a thin cloth between the ice pack and your skin.) This reduces pain.
- After the first 2 or 3 days, use a warm pack or heating pad for 20 minutes at a time. Hot showers will also help. Hot baths may help as long as you can lie or sit in a position that does not stress your back. You may also keep using ice if it helps.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
 - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
 - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
 - Do not take two or more pain medicines at the same time unless the doctor told you to. Many pain medicines have acetaminophen, which is Tylenol. Too much acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be harmful.
- Take short walks several times a day. You can start with 5 to 10 minutes, 3 to 4 times a day, and work up to longer walks. Stick to level surfaces and avoid hills and stairs until your back is better.
- Return to work and other activities as soon as you can. Continued rest without activity is usually not good for your back.
- To prevent future back pain, do exercises to stretch and strengthen your back and stomach. Learn how to use good posture, safe lifting techniques, and proper body mechanics.

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When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You lose bladder or bowel control.
- You suddenly cannot walk or stand.
- You have sudden numbness or weakness in both legs.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new pain, numbness, tingling, or weakness, especially in the buttocks, genital or rectal area, legs, or feet.
- You have symptoms of a urinary infection. For example:
 - You have blood or pus in your urine.
 - You have pain in your back just below your rib cage. This is called flank pain.
 - You have a fever, chills, or body aches.
 - It hurts to urinate. You have groin or belly pain.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your back pain gets worse or more frequent.
- Your back pain is not better after 1 week of home treatment. It may take a lot longer for the pain to go away completely, but it should feel at least a little better.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <http://www.kp.org>

Enter I594 in the search box to learn more about "**Back Pain: After Your Visit**".

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