LOW BACK PAIN what you can do



Back pain

Nearly 80 percent of adults will experience back pain at some point in their life. The good news is that back pain will normally go away within four to six weeks with good self-care. However, 60 to 86 percent of us will have the pain return unless we actively try to prevent it. You can manage or prevent your back pain flare-ups by focusing on the following areas:

- 1. Proper movements and positions for daily activities.
- 2. Regular low back exercise that includes aerobic exercise, strengthening your core muscles, and stretching.
- 3. Your overall health.

Where does back pain come from?

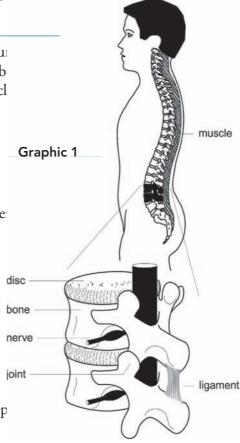
Your back is made up of a numof different parts, including b joints, ligaments, discs, muscl and nerves. Back pain can begin in any of these areas. (See Graphic 1.)

Bones. The bones in your back are called vertebrae.

Joints. A joint is formed when the vertebrae meet.

These joints allow the spine to bend and move. Joints lose some of their ability to move as you age.

Ligaments. These are strong bands that hold bones together. When ligaments are pulled or over-stretched, it is called a sp



Discs. Discs are made up of many layers of fibro-cartilage with a soft center called a nucleus. Discs are located between the vertebrae and are designed to support the spine and act like a shock absorber. However, over time the discs can lose their elasticity and lose their ability to absorb shock and to provide stability. Although this can be very painful, it is rarely dangerous.

Muscles. The muscles surrounding your back provide support and allow you to move. When muscles are pulled, it is called a strain.

Nerves. Nerves carry messages to the brain and control the muscles. The nerves of your spine branch out from behind the discs and spread to other parts of your body.

What makes it hurt?

Most back pain results from injury or irritation to one or more of the parts described above. Most commonly this is due to one of the following:

- Pulling or twisting when lifting, which can cause strains or sprains of muscles, ligaments, or discs.
- Repetitive activities like frequent bending or stooping or unhealthy postures like sitting too long or slouching.
- Changes to the normal condition of joints and discs over time.

What can I do to help my back?

Use cold or heat. Place a cold or heat pack in the area where it hurts for 10-15 minutes to help with the pain. Make sure there is a thin cloth layer between the skin and the cold or heat pack. Repeat this several times per day as needed.

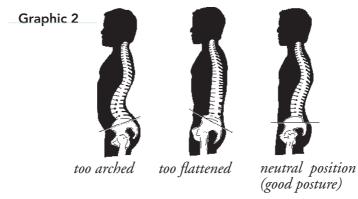
Take medications as directed. Take your medication as your doctor has prescribed. It may take 10 to 14 days for the medication to be fully effective.

Pay close attention to your movements and body position.

Good posture, both when you are still or in motion, can help you to move with less pain and get around more easily.

Proper movements and positions for daily activity

Try to keep your body in a neutral position, a comfortable position (midway between flat and arched). (See Graphic 2)



When you are at home or at work, use these tips to keep your back in a neutral, comfortable position.

Sitting

If sitting hurts, don't do it. If you must sit, avoid sitting in one position for more than 30 minutes.

- Use a towel roll to support your low back or sit on a wedge cushion. This may help you maintain a neutral position and reduce discomfort while sitting.
- Avoid sitting on the floor or soft couches.



Rising from sitting

- Scoot to the edge of your seat.
- Place your feet slightly apart with one foot in front of the other.
- Bend forward from your hips.
- Stand by pushing with your legs and using your arms to push off the seat.
- Stand with a slight lean towards your front foot, keeping your back in a good position.



Getting in and out of a car (See Graphic 3)



- Try not to twist your back when you get into and out of a car.
- Keep your back in a neutral position.
- Move the car seat all the way back.
- Shift your back and legs together so they are facing the same direction as you turn to position yourself to get into or out of the car.
- Use your arms to push to a standing position.

Standing

- Use good standing posture to protect your back and to decrease the load on the discs.
- Keep your knees relaxed, not straight.
- Keep your feet a few inches apart with your weight evenly distributed.
- Keep your back in a neutral position.

Bending forward

Try to avoid rounding your back and bending forward with activities such as shaving, brushing your teeth, dressing, making the bed, or moving around in the kitchen.

Try the following:

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.
- Squat down slightly and stick your rear end out.
- Keep your back in a neutral position.
- Place one hand on the counter to brace yourself.
- Keep your body as upright as possible.

Dressing

- Avoid bending your back (as in touching your toes).
 Wear slip-on shoes, when possible.
- To put on socks and shoes, bring your leg up toward your body or place your foot on a chair to keep your back in a neutral position. Bend from the hips.

Sleeping

Try both of these positions to find what is most comfortable for you.

- Lying on your back, use a pillow under your knees.
- Lying on your side, use one pillow between your legs.





Getting out of bed

- Gently tighten your stomach and buttock muscles.
- Roll to your side keeping your hips and shoulders moving together.
- Move your feet slowly off the side of the bed as you push with your arms into the bed to sit up.









Getting into bed

- Sit at the edge of the bed and place your hands on the bed.
- Tighten your stomach and buttock muscles.
- Slowly lower your body towards the bed with your arms as you lift your feet up.
- Lie onto your side.

Low back exercises

The following are exercises that will help ease your symptoms and speed your recovery. If pain or other symptoms increase while you are doing any of the exercises listed below, stop doing them. Talk with your doctor or physical therapist about modifying the exercise or doing a different exercise that does not increase your pain.

General guidelines

• Exercises should be pain-free. Remember to stay relaxed and keep breathing as you perform these exercises.

- Avoid exercises that increase any leg and back symptoms, such as pain, numbness, or tingling. It is OK to feel stretching in the leg and back muscles.
- Start by doing five repetitions of each of the following exercises. Add a few more repetitions every three to four days until you are able to do about 10 repetitions of each.

☐ Pelvic rock

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your low back in a comfortable position.
- Find your neutral position by gently arching and flattening your back until you find a position where you are most comfortable.

☐ Abdominal/Gluteal isometric

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your low back in a comfortable position.
- Gently tighten the stomach muscles by drawing in your belly button towards the floor. Gently tighten your buttock muscles without moving the lower back.
- Hold for 5 to 10 seconds.

☐ Knee toward chest

- Lie on your back with a pillow under your head for comfort.
- With both hands, pull your knee toward your chest; hold the stretch 10 to 30 seconds.
- Tighten your stomach muscles and then slowly let your leg back down.
- Repeat this stretch on the other leg.
- You can use a towel behind your leg if needed. Place the towel behind your thigh, holding onto the ends. Pull the towel ends to bring your leg toward your chest.

☐ Trunk rotation

- Lie on your back with a pillow under your head for comfort.
- Keep your knees together and slowly move your knees to the left. Move as far as is comfortable.





- Hold for 10-15 seconds
- Return back to the starting position.
- Keep your knees together and slowly move your knees to the right.

☐ All 4s Stretch

- Start on your hands and knees with your back in a comfortable position. Your hands should be directly below your shoulders.
 Your knees should be directly below your hips.
- Round your back toward the ceiling.
 Let your head drop slightly, looking down at the floor. Return to the starting position.
- Raise your tailbone toward the ceiling and let your back sag. Return to the starting position.
- Switch back and forth between rounded and arched positions using a small, comfortable range of motion.







Self-traction techniques

At times, taking pressure off your back by unloading it (self traction) will make you feel better. Unload your back frequently (possibly every hour) throughout the day using one or more of the following techniques. Be gentle and hold each for 10 to 15 seconds. Repeat as often as needed for pain relief.

☐ Traction pulling a stick

Lie in front of a doorway on your back with your knees bent. With your arms overhead, gently pull a cane or broomstick against the opposite side of the doorway.



☐ Traction sitting

Sit in a chair with arm rests. Push down with your arms until your bottom slightly clears the chair.



☐ Traction standing

Leaning forward over a table or countertop, support part of your weight with your arms.





☐ Hook-lying Leg Press

Lie on your back with your knees bent or lie on your back with your lower legs resting on a chair. Gently push on your thighs.





Aerobic Exercise

Resting one to three days after an acute injury may be recommended, but too much bed rest can actually make your back pain worse and delay your recovery. You will recover faster if you are in good physical condition. It is helpful to do at least light and easy activity, as long as your symptoms don't worsen. Spread your activity out during the week and, if you need to, into smaller chunks of time during the day. Begin with 10 minutes of moderate activity, 3 times a day, 5 days a week and if you are able, work up to 60 minutes per day, 5 days a week. If you sit a lot during the day, consider walking during your breaks.

- Take short 10 minute walks frequently throughout the day.
- As you walk, keep your back in the neutral position.
- Limit your step length to avoid more tension on the back.
- Wear athletic shoes.

Call your doctor if you have:

- · Severe pain in your belly, back or chest
- Recent changes in your bowel or bladder control or difficulty initiating urination
- Any new weakness or numbness in one or both legs
- A fever that does not go away
- Pain or numbness in the genital region

Emotions and Your Overall Health

Emotions affect your back and every part of your body. This is what we mean by the "mind-body" response. Be sure to:

 Reduce your stress and anxiety level. Back pain is commonly associated with high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.
 Studies show that people who do not treat these issues have a slower recovery from back pain.

- Get plenty of sleep.
- Maintain a healthy weight and exercise on a regular basis.
- Maintain a well-balanced diet; eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid tobacco products like cigarettes, cigars, or chewing tobacco.
- Assess your relationships. Healthy close relationships can affect your health.

Other resources

- Visit the home page of your doctor or physical therapist at kp.org/mydoctor to learn about our interactive WebCare for Back Pain program. The program offers personalized recommendations to relieve pain and includes video demonstrations.
- When your back feels better, visit the home page of your doctor or physical therapist at kp.org/mydoctor, and look for back and spine care videos.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- Your health, including your back pain, can be seriously affected by violence or abuse. If you are hit, hurt or threatened by a partner or spouse, there is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

Consult with your physical therapist or doctor if you experience an increase in your symptoms with recommended exercises, or if you develop new symptoms of numbness, tingling or a spread of the pain. This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

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