



# Low back pain

Low back problems affect the spine's flexibility, stability, and strength, which can cause pain, discomfort, and stiffness. This can be experienced as tenderness, pain, and stiffness in the lower back; difficulty standing erect or standing in one position for a long time; discomfort while sitting; weakness and leg fatigue while walking; or pain that radiates into the buttocks or legs.

Low back pain is usually caused by strain from lifting, twisting, or bending. Poor overall fitness, smoking, and general life dissatisfaction increase a person's risk for low back problems.



## How is low back pain managed?

### *Lifestyle and nutrition*

In general, low back pain can be relieved and prevented with lifestyle changes. Exercising to strengthen your muscles, maintaining a healthy weight, and practicing good posture all help. Learning to bend and lift properly, sleeping on a firm mattress, sitting in supportive chairs, and wearing supportive shoes are important factors.



## Medications

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), for example ibuprofen, can help relieve the pain. If not, you may need muscle relaxants or corticosteroids to reduce any inflammation.



## Supplements and herbs



Calcium and magnesium can regulate muscle contraction and ease muscle spasm. B-complex vitamin levels are all reduced with stress and pain.

Herbs can be used to give pain relief and reduce inflammation. These include white willow bark, devil's claw and St John's wort. Turmeric can also reduce inflammation, especially with digestive problems. Bromelain acts as an anti-inflammatory, and works especially well with turmeric.

Other herbs may be useful to relieve muscle spasm. These include valerian, especially with sleeplessness, wild yam, and petasites (butterbur) for short term use.

Herbs such as rosemary leaves also help with poor circulation, especially with digestive problems, and ginkgo biloba. Black haw (American sloe) and Jamaica dogwood are relaxants.

Topical treatment may be helpful for acute problems, mixing the essential oil or tincture into vegetable oil and rubbing into the affected area, St John's wort for nerve pain, arnica for inflammation, and lobelia to relieve muscle spasm.



### *Complementary and alternative therapies*

These can be effective for easing muscle tension, correcting spinal imbalances, relieving discomfort, improving function, and averting long-term back problems by improving muscle strength and joint stability.



Physical therapies include the following;

Osteopathic manipulation to help relieve the pain and restore function.

Chiropractic spinal manipulation, to both relieve pain and restore function.

Massage, which may be helpful both acutely and to prevent chronic problems.

Contrast hydrotherapy, using alternate hot and cold applications by alternating three minutes hot with one minute cold, may also provide relief.

An acupuncturist's management of low back pain often involves a comprehensive approach including acupuncture, specialised massage, application of warming herbal oils, and education.

### ***Surgery and other procedures***

For long-term back pain, your doctor may recommend imaging and surgery.



## **What else do I need to consider?**

Chronic low back problems can interfere with everyday activities, sleep, and concentration. When symptoms are severe, your mood and sexuality may be affected. While depression is usually not the cause of chronic low back pain, it often complicates treatment.

Some low back pain can be a symptom of a more serious condition, such as an infection, a rheumatic or arthritic condition, a ruptured or bulging disk, or compression fractures of the bones in the spine can also cause low back pain, especially in older women with osteoporosis.



## **Links and Resources**

### ***Inside Radiology***

[www.insideradiology.com.au](http://www.insideradiology.com.au)

### ***Better Health Channel***

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

### ***The Cochrane Library***

<http://summaries.cochrane.org/search/site/low%20back%20pain>



***Note: For better results, the optimal dosage of herbs or supplements must be used. Please speak with your healthcare provider for optimal dosage information.***