

# Considering Your Options for Low Back Pain

*Self-Care, Chiropractic, Physical Therapy and Acupuncture*



# Your Options

Low back pain is common. It can be short-term (acute) or long-lasting (chronic). This pain may interfere with your everyday activities, walking, physical activity, leisure and work.

If you have low back pain, you may have many treatment options. You may try self-care on its own or with other options, such as chiropractic or physical therapy. The options available to you will depend on your needs. You may choose to use one or more of the following:

- ☐ self-care (see pages 4 and 6)
- ☐ chiropractic (see pages 5 and 6)
- ☐ physical therapy (see pages 5 and 7)
- ☐ acupuncture (see pages 5 and 7).

Together, you and your health care provider will decide what options are safe for you and decide how to best treat your low back pain. This decision will be based on the benefits and risks of each option and your values and preferences. You can change your mind at any time. Talk with your health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

**Important:** If you have not talked to a health care provider about your low back pain, wait to start any new treatment. Talk with your health care provider about your pain.

Before talking with your health care provider, you may begin using self-care activities you feel comfortable starting. If an activity causes new or increased pain or discomfort, stop. Talk with your health care provider about your pain.

## Other Options

Your health care provider may talk with you about other treatments such as injections and prescription medicine. This will depend on:

- when your low back pain began
- the cause of your pain
- the treatment options you have used and how well they worked
- your values, needs and preferences.

## When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you have:

- new back pain or pain that gets worse
- tried self-care, chiropractic, physical therapy or a combination of these for 2 to 4 weeks and your back pain does not improve
- a serious injury that causes new back pain (fall, car accident, sports injury)
- fever or unexplained weight loss
- loss of bowel or bladder control
- severe numbness, tingling, pain or weakness in an arm or leg that gets worse or spreads
- loss of feeling in your anal or genital area
- severe pain at night or pain that gets worse when you lie down
- questions about your pain, medicines or treatment.

# Understanding Low Back Pain

## Causes

Your back is composed of a spinal column (vertebrae), discs, spinal cord (and nerves), ligaments and muscles. A back injury, spine disorder or disease may affect one or more of these parts. Some back pain occurs without a back injury, spine disorder or disease.

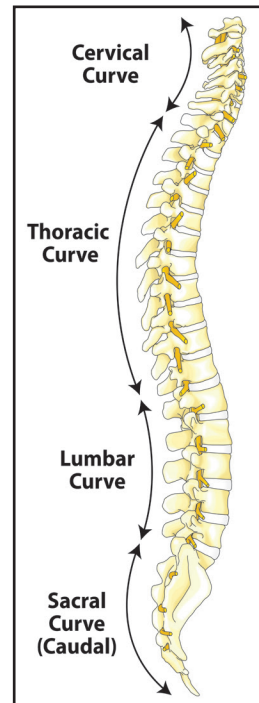
Often, the cause of low back pain can't be determined. This is true even if you know a specific event that caused it such as a fall or car accident.

Often, low back pain is the result of years of smaller injuries to your spine. These may include minor sprains and strains, poor posture, stress or working conditions.

Low back pain can also be caused by stress, a lack of physical activity or both. People who have strong and flexible spines have fewer injuries.

## Tests

Most of the time, tests are not necessary and do not help with treatment. Your health care provider will give you an exam to check for serious conditions. Depending on your exam and health history, your health care provider will talk with you about what tests he or she thinks you should have. These tests include MRIs, X-rays and EMG studies.



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**Labeled parts of your spinal column.**

## Recovery

Nine out of 10 people with short-term low back pain will feel better within 6 weeks, no matter what treatments they use. The pain may come back a few times during the year.

If you have long-term low back pain, it may never fully go away. The goal is to find treatment options that let you manage your pain so you can be active every day.

Your recovery may be faster and more complete if you stay active and do as many of your everyday activities as you can (exercise, work, shop).

Spending too much time lying down or sitting in one position can cause muscle cramps or soreness. It can also affect your mental health. Follow your health care provider's directions so the pain doesn't get worse.

## Recovery From Short-Term Low Back Pain

- Recover within 6 weeks
- Don't recover within 6 weeks



**About 9 out of 10 people with short-term low back pain feel better within 6 weeks, no matter what type of treatment is used.**



# Treatment Options

## Self-care

Self-care is an important way to manage your back pain. Self-care includes treatment options you can do on your own. Your goal is to return to your normal activities as soon as possible.

Taking an active role in managing your back pain is the most important thing you can do to feel better faster.

Check with your insurance provider about coverage for self-care activities.

Some types of self-care include:

### ☐ mild aerobic exercise

These are physical activities you do to stay active and strengthen your muscles. These activities include walking, swimming, pool exercises and tai chi.

### ☐ heat or warm pack

Heat or a warm pack reduces pain by causing your blood vessels to open. This increases oxygen flow to help ease stiff joints and sore muscles.

Use heat or a warm pack no more than one time every hour for 15 to 20 minutes at a time. Place a clean, dry towel between your skin and the heat or warm pack. If the area starts to feel numb, this option is not right for you. Don't use heat or a warm pack on an area that has a wound.

### ☐ ice or cold pack

Ice or a cold pack reduces discomfort and swelling (inflammation) by numbing nerve endings.

Use ice or a cold pack no more than one time every hour for 15 to 20 minutes at a time. Place a clean, dry towel between your skin and the ice or cold pack.

### ☐ medicine

Over-the-counter pain relief medicines may reduce your pain. This type of medicine includes ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®), aspirin or naproxen (Aleve®). If you can't take these, take acetaminophen (Tylenol®). Talk with your health care provider before starting any new medicine.

### ☐ breathing and relaxation

Some easy breathing exercises can reduce stress. This helps increase blood flow to your muscles and lower your heart rate and blood pressure. Relaxation techniques are shown to increase mood and reduce feelings of stress.

### ☐ therapeutic massage

This treats the skin and soft tissues of your body to promote relaxation and enhance health and healing. Massage helps to reduce pain, anxiety, muscle tension and stress.

### ☐ yoga

This uses meditation, breathing techniques and gentle movement to relax your body and mind. Yoga helps to reduce pain and relax your muscles.

There are different types of yoga. If a yoga position causes new or increased pain or discomfort, stop. Talk with your health care provider about your pain. You may need to change your treatment plan.

### ☐ get enough sleep

Get at least 7 hours of sleep each night. Getting enough sleep at night can help you be more alert during the day and help your body deal with pain.

### ☐ quit using tobacco

Don't use tobacco products. They can slow your body's ability to heal, increase your risk of low back pain, make it more difficult to manage your pain and make other treatments less effective.

## Chiropractic

Your health care provider may recommend you use chiropractic adjustments (spinal manipulation). Chiropractic focuses on improving the way your body moves and feels. It uses gentle, hands-on adjustments to restore joint function and alignment. This can decrease your pain and improve your movement.

During chiropractic, you may:

- have gentle, hands-on adjustments of your bones and joints
- learn lifestyle changes to improve your posture and movement (lifting, reaching, and getting in and out of bed)
- use exercises to increase your flexibility and improve the movement of your joints
- learn about healthful foods, vitamins, and herbal or natural products that can decrease pain, muscle spasms, and swelling (inflammation)
- receive other therapies to help your muscles, joints and nerves work properly and reduce pain. If you need other therapies, your chiropractor will explain your therapy to you.

You may do some of these exercises at home on your own.

Chiropractic is used with self-care and may also be used with other treatment options.

Check with your insurance provider about coverage for chiropractic visits.

## Physical Therapy

Your health care provider may recommend you use physical therapy. Physical therapy focuses on improving the way your body moves and feels. It uses exercises and lifestyle changes. This can decrease your pain and strengthen your body.

During physical therapy, you may:

- use exercises to strengthen your muscles
- learn lifestyle changes to improve your posture and movement (lifting, reaching, and getting in and out of bed)
- stretch your muscles and spine
- use hands-on movements of your bones and soft tissue to improve your movement
- develop skills of the mind to better manage your pain.

You may do some of these exercises at home on your own.

Physical therapy is used with self-care and may also be used with other treatment options.

Check with your insurance provider about coverage for physical therapy.

## Acupuncture

Your health care provider may recommend you use acupuncture. Acupuncture focuses on restoring the flow of energy (Qi) within your body to help your body heal itself and reduce pain. Qi is energy that moves through your body along channels. When you are healthy, the Qi moves freely.

During acupuncture, you will have fine, sterile acupuncture needles gently placed into your skin. These needles balance the body's Qi, bringing pain relief.

Acupuncture is used with self-care and may also be used with other treatment options.

Check with your insurance provider about coverage for acupuncture.

# Benefits and Risks

	Benefits	Risks
Self-care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ long-term or short-term pain relief</li> <li>■ more active role in your treatment</li> <li>■ no surgery or prescription medicine</li> <li>■ helps your body heal and recover (increases oxygen flow, reduces swelling, and relaxes muscles)</li> <li>■ makes you able to do more physical activities</li> <li>■ releases endorphins (your body's natural pain relievers)</li> <li>■ can start treatment as soon as back pain begins</li> <li>■ may prevent back pain from happening again</li> <li>■ may prevent or lessen chronic low back pain</li> <li>■ get better faster</li> <li>■ do treatment on your own</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ incomplete or conflicting treatment plan if you don't tell your health care providers the self-care option(s) you are using</li> <li>■ injury when doing a self-care activity wrong or without guidance</li> </ul>
Chiropractic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ long-term or short-term pain relief</li> <li>■ more active role in your treatment</li> <li>■ no surgery or prescription medicine</li> <li>■ helps your mind and body by using your body's natural ability to heal itself (allows your spine to move with less pain and increases communication between your brain, muscles and joints)</li> <li>■ makes you able to do more physical activities</li> <li>■ releases endorphins</li> <li>■ learn ways to improve your body posture and manage your pain</li> <li>■ may correct back alignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ incomplete or conflicting treatment plan if you don't tell your health care providers you are using this option.</li> </ul> <p>It is important to talk with your health care provider before you start or change the doses of vitamins or herbal or natural products.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ short-term discomfort (feeling pain, tired or sore) in the area that was treated or away from the treated area</li> </ul>

	Benefits	Risks
Physical Therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ long-term or short-term pain relief</li> <li>■ more active role in your treatment</li> <li>■ no surgery or prescription medicine</li> <li>■ helps your body (builds muscle strength and increases your heart rate and blood flow)</li> <li>■ makes you able to do more physical activities</li> <li>■ releases endorphins</li> <li>■ learn ways to improve your body posture and manage your pain</li> <li>■ increased independence and safety during everyday activities</li> <li>■ tailored treatment plan to fit your needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ incomplete or conflicting treatment plan if you don't tell your health care providers you are using this option</li> <li>■ feeling tired or sore</li> <li>■ short-term increase in pain</li> </ul>
Acupuncture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ long-term or short-term pain relief</li> <li>■ no surgery or prescription medicine</li> <li>■ helps your mind and body by using your body's natural ability to heal itself (reduces stress in your body and relaxes your mind)</li> <li>■ releases endorphins</li> <li>■ tailored treatment plan to fit your needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ incomplete or conflicting treatment plan if you don't tell your health care providers you are using this option.</li> </ul> <p>It is important to talk with your health care provider before you start or change the doses of vitamins or herbal or natural products.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ short-term tingling, warmth or discomfort at the acupuncture points</li> </ul>

# Comparing Your Options

Check the box next to any important items you prefer to help you compare the options.

Your Options			
Self-care	Chiropractic	Physical Therapy	Acupuncture
<input type="checkbox"/> do treatment on your own	<input type="checkbox"/> meet with a health care provider. May make lifestyle changes and do some exercises on your own.	<input type="checkbox"/> meet with a health care provider. May make lifestyle changes and do some exercises on your own.	<input type="checkbox"/> meet with a health care provider
<input type="checkbox"/> can start treatment as soon as back pain begins	<input type="checkbox"/> may not start treatment for several days after back pain begins	<input type="checkbox"/> may not start treatment for several days after back pain begins	<input type="checkbox"/> may not start treatment for several days after back pain begins
<input type="checkbox"/> can do treatment as many times as you need during the day	<input type="checkbox"/> fit chiropractic visits into your routine	<input type="checkbox"/> fit physical therapy sessions into your routine	<input type="checkbox"/> fit acupuncture visits into your routine
<input type="checkbox"/> may use self-care as needed before and after your pain is managed	<input type="checkbox"/> often have a specific number of chiropractic visits to manage your pain and may have chiropractic visits as needed after your pain is managed	<input type="checkbox"/> often have a specific number of physical therapy sessions to manage your pain	<input type="checkbox"/> often have a specific number of acupuncture visits to manage your pain and may have acupuncture visits as needed after your pain is managed
<input type="checkbox"/> may use over-the-counter medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> may use vitamins, herbal or natural products, or both	<input type="checkbox"/> no medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> may use vitamins, herbal or natural products, or both

\_\_\_\_\_ = Total

\_\_\_\_\_ = Total

\_\_\_\_\_ = Total

\_\_\_\_\_ = Total

Count the number of boxes you checked. The options with the most checks may be the best options for you.



# Next Steps

## Questions for Your Health Care Provider

1. Are these treatments (self-care, chiropractic, physical therapy and acupuncture) all safe for me?
2. How rare or common are the risks for the treatment I prefer?
3. How likely am I to benefit from the treatment I prefer?
4. When should I consider starting one or more of these treatment options?
5. If I decide to start any of these options, what Allina Health location(s) offer these services?
6. Can I do more than one of these treatment options at a time?
7. When should I come back for a follow-up visit?
8. When and how will I know if the treatment is helping me?
9. When should we talk about using other treatment options, such as injections and prescription medicine?
10. How likely am I to improve or recover if I don't use these treatment options?
11. What's the next step for me?
12. Other questions: \_\_\_\_\_

## Notes

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# Next Steps

## Questions for Your Insurance Provider

It is important for you to understand your health care benefits before you begin treatment.

Please call your insurance provider and find out exactly what is and isn't covered under your plan, and how much you have to pay yourself. Look for the telephone number on your membership card.

- 1. Will this treatment be covered for my medical condition?
- 2. Are there specific requirements or criteria that my treatment or I must meet to receive coverage?
- 3. How long is this treatment covered?
- 4. Which health care providers are in network?
- 5. Does my health care provider need to monitor how well this treatment works for me to continue receiving coverage?
- 6. How much will I need to pay for this treatment?
- 7. Other questions: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Notes

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# Worksheet: Your Past Treatments for Low Back Pain

What treatments have you used?	When and how long have you used them?	How well have they worked?

# Notes


# Notes




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Spanish: ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-877-506-4595.

Hmong: LUS CEEV: Yog tias koj hais lus Hmoob, cov kev pab txog lus, muaj kev pab dawb rau koj. Hu rau 1-877-506-4595.



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