

Low Back Pain

Episodes of low back pain are very common, and most are mild with people recovering in one to two months. Consider these statistics:

- More than 80 percent of adults will have low back pain at some point in their lives.
- Over time, 90 percent of people with low back pain fully recover.
- Low back pain accounts for up to 40 percent of all missed work days.
- More than 90 percent of low back pain is not caused by a serious condition.



Here, we've compiled the best information, backed by research, to help you recover from low back pain and prevent future episodes.

What does low back pain feel like?

Low back pain starts in the bottom part of your back and sometimes spreads to the buttocks, hips or legs. It can feel like stiffness or your ability to move that part of your back can be limited. Pain may come on slowly or suddenly and feels sharp and dull.

What causes low back pain?

Sometimes, no specific cause for low back pain is found. Most episodes of low back pain are caused by muscle strain or ligament sprains. Other causes can include trauma, lack of physical activity, poor health and poor repetitive posture and movement.

What can I do to ease low back pain?

- Movement is medicine. Try to stay active because it will help you return to activities.
- Change your position often.
- Apply heat or cold. Both help decrease the pain's intensity. For the first one to three days, use ice packs for 20 to 30 minutes every four to six hours. If the pain is the result of an injury, apply heat with a heating pad or hot water bottle.
- Practice good posture and ergonomics.
- Take over-the-counter pain medicines like anti-inflammatories (ibuprofen or naproxen) or acetaminophen (Tylenol or Excedrin). Before taking anything, especially if you take medicine for other medical conditions, check with your doctor.

Contact your healthcare provider if:

- Your back pain is the result of a fall or accident.
- You are 70 or older and the pain is new.
- The pain does not go away even at night or when lying down.
- You experience weakness in one or both legs.
- You have problems with bladder, bowel or sexual function.
- There is a fever or rapid weight loss when you are not trying to lose weight.
- You have a history of cancer, a weakened immune system or osteoporosis.
- There is weakness in your arms and legs that is getting worse.

continued on back



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What other help is available?

Your primary care provider can rule out any serious underlying conditions for the low back pain and recommend specific treatments that can help reduce your pain and improve your overall function. This can include advanced diagnostic imaging such as x-rays, myelogram, CT scan or MRI. You may also be sent for physical therapy or to a spine specialist.

Hartford HealthCare offers unique multidisciplinary, patient-focused care. Our team approach is tailored to the needs of each individual patient, and can include:

- Pain management. Our pain management specialists have a broad array of options to help ease your pain, from medication to injection therapy.
- Physical therapy. A thorough exam will help the physical therapist develop an individualized exercise program to help you optimize your function and reduce pain.
- Surgery. One of our spine surgeons will talk about all conservative therapies available to you before considering surgery as a last resort.



How can I prevent low back pain in the future?

- Manage your weight.
- Reduce stress.
- Get a good amount of sleep.
- Use better body mechanics.
- Stop smoking.
- Exercise regularly, after checking with your primary care provider to be sure there are no underlying conditions.

For examples of exercises you can try, scan the QR code at right and scroll down to “Back to Life Fitness Program”.



For more information on any of these services, please speak with your provider.