

# How to Manage Lower Back Pain

## What is Lower Back Pain?

Any pain or discomfort you may feel in the lower area of the back or spine.

## What can Cause Lower Back Pain?

- Lifting something heavy or straining your back muscles too hard.
- Wear and tear on the joints, disks, and ligaments that hold the spine in place.
- Disks that have become weak, that can cause a herniated or slipped disk that can swell and press on nerves.
- Osteoporosis (a condition that causes weak and brittle bones) can cause compression fractures. That's when the bones in the spine press down on each other and break.

## When Do I Need to See a Doctor?

Most lower-back pain will heal on its own within 3 months. See a doctor if:

- Pain does not stop after 3 months and/or the pain becomes more intense.
- Pain causes weakness, numbness, tingling, or swelling on one or both legs.

During this time, try not to stay in bed because that can make lower back pain worse. Instead, try walking or other slow movements.

## What Types of Treatment are Available?

The type of treatment you get from your doctor will depend on the type of pain you have. Your doctor will most likely try treating your pain with physical therapy, massage, relaxation therapy, or acupuncture. In some cases, your doctor may prescribe medicine.

## What Can I Do to Manage Lower Back Pain?

Talk to your doctor about trying activities like the ones listed below to help control pain before trying medication. These activities can help some people control their pain better than taking medication.

- Stay active! Exercise and stretching can help a lot.
- Get massages.
- Try physical therapy.
- Try acupuncture.
- Apply cold or hot where you feel pain (ask your doctor which is best for you).
- Stay busy doing activities you enjoy. It can help keep your mind off the pain.
- Remember, try not to stay in bed too long. It can actually make your back pain worse.



# How to Manage Lower Back Pain

## Learn about Pain Medicine.

There are many types of pain medications. Be sure to talk to your doctor about which of these medicines are OK for you to use and if there are any possible side effects. If you do need medicine, you should do the following:

**First**, try an over-the-counter pain medicine, like ibuprofen (Advil) or naproxen (Aleve). These drugs can help reduce swelling and inflammation.

**Second**, if those medicines don't work or they are not an option for you; your doctor might prescribe something stronger like duloxetine (Cymbalta). You'll need a prescription from your doctor.

**Third**, a medicine that could be used, but only as a **last option** is an opioid like OxyContin, Percocet, or Vicodin. Opioids are strong medicines that work well to help with pain, but only for a short time. Keep in mind that opioids have serious risks and can be dangerous. Patients who take opioids for a long period of time may:

- Become addicted.
- Get used to taking the medicine and it may not work like it should.
- Take more medicine than needed by accident, which can cause death.
- Have side effects like constipation, drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, depression, and may lead to other serious complications.



**Medicine can be expensive. Ask your doctor if generic versions are available. They work the same and cost a lot less.**

## What You Can Do to Help Reduce Your Risk of Overusing an Opioid

- Talk with your doctor about other things you can do to treat pain besides taking an opioid medicine.
- Don't take an opioid until you have tried taking other types of medicine that are safer to take such as a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug like ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, and generic) or naproxen (Aleve and generic).
- If you do take opioids, talk to your doctor to learn and understand how to use the medicine, how to store it, and what to do with the opioid medicine after you don't need it or if it has expired.
- Ask your doctor what you should do if you accidentally take too much medicine.

**Note:** You must store and lock up your medicine for safety. If too much medicine is taken or it is taken accidentally by a child or pet, it can cause serious harm, including death. Talk to your doctor about the dangers of taking an opioid.