

Oh, My aching Back- What should I do?

If you suffer from back pain, please know that you are not alone. It's estimated that 1 out of every 3 adults will have low back pain at some point in their life. Back pain generally begins to affect people in their 20s, has the highest incidence between 40-45 and becomes less common after 65 years old. The good news is that approximately 50% of sufferers recover in two weeks and 90% recover within 12 weeks.

Low back pain is usually classified as acute or chronic. In general, acute back pain lasts less than 3 months and chronic back pain last longer than 3 months and is recurrent.

Muscle strains are common types of back injuries and are usually due to overuse. Ligaments, disks, joints and bones may also cause pain if injured. In the acute phase of back pain, an inflammatory reaction begins that results in pain, spasm and stiffness which can lasts from two weeks to three months.

Acute back pain may respond well to the following conservative treatment:

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS).

Avoiding activities that aggravate your symptoms, usually bending and lifting.

Ice/heat application. - Ice only for first 72 hours.

Gentle stretching to regain range of motion.

If you develop bowel or bladder incontinence and or progressive leg weakness, it is considered a medical emergency and medical treatment should be sought immediately.

Ice application (cryotherapy) is beneficial in the first 72 hours to reduce back pain. It slows the inflammation process, numb sore tissues, and slows nerve impulses of the pain fibers, thus reducing the overall pain experience. However a few cautions must be heeded.

Cold Precautions:

Never leave bare ice in one position on the skin.

Ice application should not be used for patients who have rheumatoid arthritis, Raynaud's Syndrome, cold allergies condition, paralysis or areas on impaired sensation.

A cold pack can be made using a damp towel and ice. This is applied to the injured area for no longer than 15-20 min. This can be repeated 2-3 times a day. Ice massage is also a good alternative. Water is frozen in a Styrofoam cup. The top is then peeled away to expose the ice. The ice is then applied only to a six-inch area moving in a circular pattern. Limit the ice massage to 5 minutes to prevent ice burns.

If your back pain persists, you should consult your primary physician for further evaluation and diagnosis. To assist you in your recovery, your primary physician may refer you for physical therapy.

A physical therapist will perform a musculoskeletal evaluation and identify your functional limitations. A plan of treatment is developed for you based on your goals. Manual therapy, therapeutic exercise and various pain-reducing modalities such as moist heat, ultrasound and electrical stimulation may be used as part of your treatment. An importance part of every successful therapy program should be patient education and a home exercise program to minimize reoccurrence of back pain.

Following a few simple steps can help you to minimize and control your back pain.