

Preventing Back Injuries

These injuries can result in loss of work and your ability to do the things you love!



You can hurt your back at any time, whether working in your yard, building a project, playing a sport or simply bending over. Before jumping into physical activities, think about protecting your back. Consider these tips to help prevent an injury that can cause low back pain:

- ✦ Allow your body to wake up. Stretching and light exercise will help prepare your body for strenuous tasks.
- ✦ When turning, move your entire body and not just your spine. This is especially important when you are carrying heavy items.
- ✦ Take breaks from your tasks to stretch and relax your muscles.
- ✦ Be sure the tools you are using are not too heavy for you.
- ✦ Always use proper lifting techniques. Bend at the knees and not at the back.

WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR LOW BACK PAIN?

Treatment for low back pain varies, depending on the cause of the pain. For most people, back pain usually improves within a few days with rest and the use of over-the-counter pain medicines. But it's important to remain active if possible. Staying in bed for more than one or two days can make your pain worse.

Some people will need to see a doctor, especially if the pain worsens or persists. If that's the case, you need to provide your doctor with certain information to assist with your treatment plan. If your back pain is related to an activity, explain when and how the injury occurred and how long you've had the pain.

The American Pain Foundation provides a simple memory aid known as LOCATES to help describe your pain. Tell your doctor:

- L:** Location of the pain and whether it travels to other body parts.
- O:** Other associated symptoms such as nausea, numbness or weakness.
- C:** Character of the pain, whether it's throbbing, sharp, dull or burning.
- A:** Aggravating and alleviating factors. What makes the pain better or worse?
- T:** Timing of the pain – is it constant or intermittent? How long does it last?
- E:** Environment where the pain occurs, for example, while working or at home.
- S:** Severity of the pain. Use a 0-to-10 pain scale from no pain to worst ever.

You should also tell your doctor about any basic self-care treatments you have done and whether these treatments made your pain better or worse.

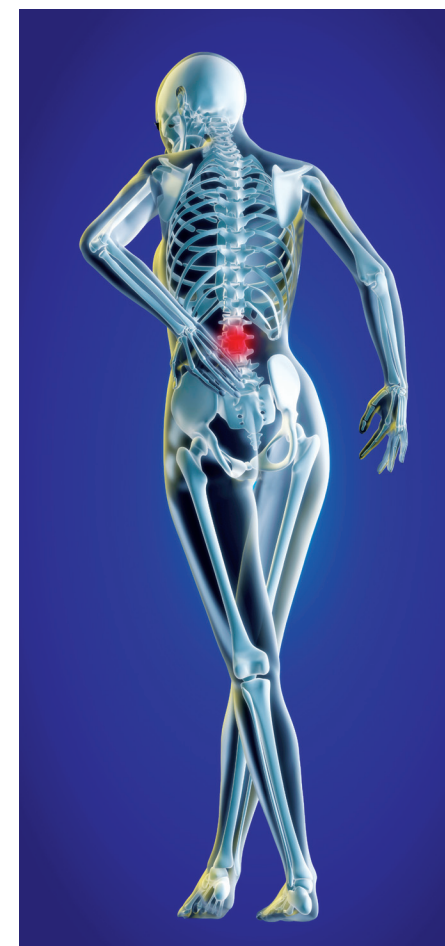
WHAT ABOUT X-RAYS OR OTHER IMAGING STUDIES?

Providing your doctor with a complete history and description of your back pain will determine the next steps. Your doctor may prescribe some exercises to strengthen your lower back and stomach or recommend physical therapy. X-rays and other imaging studies, such as a CT scan or MRI, may not be appropriate, although these tests are extremely beneficial when done in the right situation.

WILL MY BACK PAIN REOCCUR?

Unfortunately, once you have had back pain, it's likely to reoccur. To help prevent this from happening, keep your back and stomach muscles strong, use good posture, learn the safest way to lift heavy objects and learn to manage stress.

If you would like additional information or have questions, you can contact Capital BlueCross' Nurse Line anytime, any day. To use this service, simply have your member ID card handy and call toll-free, 800-452-BLUE. You can also visit www.ninds.nih.gov.



MORE TIPS FOR PREVENTING BACK STRAIN

- ✦ Don't lift by bending over. Lift an object by bending your knees and squatting to pick up the object. Keep your back straight and hold the object close to your body. Avoid twisting your body while lifting.
- ✦ Push rather than pull when you must move heavy objects.
- ✦ If you must sit at your desk or at the wheel of a car or truck for long hours, break up the time with stops to stretch.
- ✦ Wear flat shoes or shoes with low heels.
- ✦ Exercise regularly. An inactive lifestyle contributes to low back pain.