

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONDITION: Low Back Pain

Low back pain (LBP) is a **COMMON CONDITION** that can make everyday activities painful and difficult. During your recovery, it is important to stay active and try to do as much of your normal routine as possible, as this will help your back heal.

### Low Back Pain By the Numbers



**80% of adults experience LBP at some point in their lifetime<sup>1</sup>**



**Over time, 90% of patients with acute low back pain fully recover<sup>2</sup>**



**LBP accounts for up to 40% all missed workdays<sup>1</sup>**



**More than 90% of back pain is not caused by a serious condition<sup>2</sup>**

### How does the spine work?

Your spine, made up of bones called vertebrae, is like a **mast on a ship**. The muscles that attach to the spine are the ropes that support the mast and prevent it from curving and becoming unstable.

If the supporting muscles are weak or imbalanced, the spine experiences a lot of stress. By strengthening these muscles, you can take pressure off of your spine and reduce your back pain.



IMBALANCED MUSCLES



SUPPORTING MUSCLES

### What does low back pain feel like?

Low back pain is felt on the backside of the body, either directly in the low back or spreading down to your buttocks, hips, and one or both of your legs. Other symptoms involved with low back pain vary greatly from person to person. Pain may come on slowly or suddenly, and feel sharp or dull. You may also feel stiffness or muscle spasms. Some people find that changing positions, reclining, or lying down helps relieve their symptoms.

## What causes low back pain?

While there are many causes of LBP, most people have “non-specific low back pain.” This means that there is not a specific disease or abnormality causing the pain. Common causes of low back pain include trauma, lack of physical activity, poor health, and poor or repetitive postures and movements. However, sometimes there is not a direct cause of low back pain<sup>3</sup>.

Factors that increase the risk of developing low back pain include smoking, obesity, physically strenuous or sedentary work, a stressful or dissatisfying job, and psychological factors such as anxiety or depression.

## Lifestyle Changes and Management

### EXERCISE



It is important to stay active and continue as much of your regular activity as possible during your recovery. Low-impact exercises like walking, stretching, yoga, and swimming are common activities that will help you recover from low back pain.

### ICING



Place a cold pack on your back for 10-15 minutes, every 2 to 3 hours, to help ease the pain. Be sure to place the ice in a thin cloth layer before putting it directly on your skin.

### POSTURE



Practice good postural habits in the office, during rest, and in your day to day activities. Having healthy posture will lessen the strain on your muscles, tendons, and ligaments.

## When to contact your healthcare provider

Seek medical attention if you experience any of the following:

- Your back pain is a result of a fall or an accident
- You are 70 years or older with a new onset of back pain
- Pain that does not go away, even at night or when lying down
- Weakness in one or both legs or problems with bladder, bowel, or sexual function
- Your back pain is accompanied by unexplained fever or rapid weight loss when not trying to lose weight
- If you have a history of cancer, a weakened immune system, or osteoporosis
- Your back pain does not improve within 4 weeks

## References:

1. Deyo RA, Mirza SK, Martin BI. Back pain prevalence and visit rates: estimates from US national surveys, 2002. *Spine*. 2006;31:2724-7.
2. Ngyuen TH and Randolph DC. Nonspecific Low Back Pain and Return to Work. *Am Fam Physician*. 2007; 15:76(10):1497-1502.
3. Patel, AT and Abna, OA. Diagnosis and Management of Acute Low Back Pain. *Am Fam Physician*. 2000;15;61(6):1779-1786.