



Treating Lower Back Pain

Ways to treat lower back pain that might surprise you

Back pain is one of the most common physical ailments and nearly everyone will experience lower back pain at some point. Whether it is a nagging ache or debilitating pain, lower back pain can be stressful and put the brakes on our lives—keeping us from our jobs and from participating with family and friends. The good news is that there are a lot of options for treating lower back pain that can give you relief and keep you from needing expensive tests or surgeries.

First Things First

Be sure to talk to your doctor. Regardless of the intensity of your pain, you may want to let your doctor know what is going on. They can advise you if you might need to come in, prescribe medication if needed, or write you a referral. Keeping your doctor advised as you experience pain helps create a record which can be useful to your doctor in deciding on future care if needed.

If you've been in an accident, had an old injury flare up, or if your back pain is sudden and severe, or it has lasted more than three months (even if it comes and goes), be sure to seek care immediately.

Home Remedies

While we may want a quick fix, back pain typically can take some time to clear up. Before ordering imaging, like an MRI, or prescribing medications, your doctor might want you to try a few home remedies first. For most people their back pain will resolve given a little time and effort.

Here are a few recommended treatments you can do on your own:

- **Treat the pain.** Using hot or cold packs and over-the-counter pain medications like Advil or Tylenol won't cure the problem, but they can help make the pain more tolerable and help with muscle aches and stiffness. Medicated creams and patches that contain ingredients such as menthol, camphor, or lidocaine can cool, heat, or numb the affected area, offering temporary relief.
- **Keep moving.** While it may be tempting to stay in bed, doing so can make the pain worse over time, reduce flexibility, and weaken muscle tone. Going for walks may seem counterintuitive, but it is one of the best things you can do for back pain.
- **Strengthening your core.** Strong muscles, especially in your abdominal core, help support your back. You can strengthen your core and the muscles around your hips with simple at-home exercises, or by taking a Tai Chi, Pilates or yoga class.
- **Manage your stress.** Surprisingly, back pain can be caused and exacerbated not just by physical ailments, but also by emotional ones. Depression, anxiety, PTSD, and other forms of emotional stress can impact how our brain perceives pain. Finding ways to manage stress—by keeping moving, taking a yoga class, or talking to a mental health professional—could help you manage your lower back pain as well.

Sources: [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com) and [WebMD.com](https://www.webmd.com)

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Medical Options

Your primary care doctor is always your best first call, but there are many other medical professionals who may be able to help. Talk to your doctor about what they recommend, and for any referrals you may need.

Here are several alternative types of treatment to try:

- **Physical Therapy.** Physical therapy (PT) is often prescribed for low back pain and can help you safely work past pain and teach you exercises to improve your mobility, flexibility, and strengthen your core. PT is also often available now over telehealth, giving you more options for who to work with and when to meet.
- **Massage Therapy.** Massage has been proven to aid in relieving back pain. It can help loosen up muscles, increase circulation and blood flow (which reduces inflammation) and improve your range of motion.
- **Acupuncture.** Acupuncture is a traditional therapy based on the idea of energetics in the body and uses needles to stimulate specific nerves and areas of the body. The needles are not meant to be painful, and research on chronic lower back pain shows that acupuncture helps relieve muscle and nerve tension, and increases blood flow.
- **Chiropractic Adjustments.** Using manual therapies, chiropractic professionals focus on spinal manipulation (adjusting the spine and surrounding structures), and mobilization (stretching the joints and muscles) to increase range of motion. Chiropractic adjustments are a commonly prescribed treatment for back pain.

Most lower back pain will resolve in time with home remedies, but always talk to your doctor about what might be best for you. Lower back pain can be tough, but with so many treatment options and specialists there are many steps you can take to get relief.



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