

## Back Pain

Back pain affects 90% of individuals at some point in time, and is the second most common reason for doctor visits in America. Most back pain resolves within six to twelve weeks (over 90%), while the rest turns chronic and lasts for months to years.



Back pain is one of the most common reasons that individuals miss work and treated by a doctor (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 2012).

### **What are the Symptoms of Back Pain and When Should I See a Doctor?**

The most common symptoms of back pain are pain that radiates through the back and sometimes into the extremities. Muscle achiness is common whether a person experiences low, mid or upper back pain.

Limited range of motion and lack of mobility may arise due to chronic pain in the back. Shooting and stabbing pain is often described with low back pain that radiates into the buttocks and into the hip areas.

It is important to see a doctor if the pain does not subside within a couple of weeks. Most acute back pain resolves on its own, but a pain management clinic in Los Angeles or treatment with a chiropractor may make it much more tolerable.

Immediate medical attention should be sought if:

- The pain causes problems with incontinence or bladder control
- It is the result of a fall or blow to the back, such as a motor vehicle accident

- Pain is associated with a fever and throbbing pain in the abdominal region

If the pain is prolonged and has progressed in level of severity over time, you may need to seek medical care and discuss with your doctor the need for pain management.

### **What are the Common Causes of Back Pain?**

Many times back pain results with no known cause, in fact over 75% of the time this is the case. This is one of the challenges in treating the condition. Despite diagnostic tests, doctors may not be able to identify the cause for chronic back pain. However, there are certain conditions linked to back pain, which include:

- Arthritis and osteoarthritis – often seen in the low back resulting in lumbar pain and tenderness. May lead to spinal stenosis where the space around the spinal cord is narrowed.
- Disc bulge or rupture – may lead to chronic pain over time due to the pressure of the disc.
- Muscle or ligament strain – this is the most common cause of back pain and often the most treatable, however it does take time to heal. Movement and mobility may exacerbate symptoms.
- Osteoporosis – may result in compression fractures of the vertebrae due to the brittle nature of the bone.
- Degenerative disc disease – Over time, discs may lose water and sustain painful tears in the outer part of the disc.
- Tumors – may lead to chronic back pain



### **What are the Treatment Options for Back Pain?**

With or without a diagnosis for the cause of back pain, the condition can be treated. Chronic back pain treatment goals are designed to alleviate pain and symptoms associated with the condition. The Los Angeles pain doctor works with the patient to identify the cause, however, if unknown, treatment options to decrease pain and improve range of motion and activity level are sought after.

Treatment for back pain typically involves a combination of therapy and medication and potentially, injections. While most back pain improves within a few weeks or months, some pain is chronic, lasting months and years if not cared for properly.

Common forms of treatment may include:

**Medications** – Your doctor may prescribe pain relievers, anti-inflammatories, and muscle relaxants to help relieve pain. Low doses of certain forms of anti-depressants may also be prescribed, as they have been shown to help relieve chronic pain (Wolfe, J Rheum Arthritis, 2009). For short term exacerbations, opioids may be used. Over the long term, the risks of narcotics start to outweigh the benefits.



**Physical therapy** – Other forms of treatment in which massage, heat and TENS unit therapy work in combination with one another includes the use of physical therapy. Therapy may include ultrasound, electrical stimulation and other procedures that help relieve muscle tension and reduce soft tissue pain.

**Injections** – Cortisone injections may be administered for pain, especially in chronic pain conditions of the back where the pain radiates down the leg. This may involve trigger point injections, facet joint injections, medial branch blocks or injections of cortisone into the disc space itself.

**Radiofrequency Ablation** – this treatment has been one of the most revolutionary interventions of the 21st Century. This treatment may provide six to eighteen months of pain relief at a time.

**Alternative medicine** – Other forms of conservative treatment for back pain may include chiropractic care, acupuncture, massage and relaxation techniques. Good body mechanics and proper posture techniques may be shown to the patient to help relieve symptoms and prevent future problems from arising.

