

My Aching Back!

AN APPROACH TO BACK PAIN MANAGEMENT

Anatomy of the Spine ►

Symptoms and Causes of Back Pain ►

Exams and Treatments ►

Prevention and Protection ►

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A Word About Back Pain

According to recent research from the National Institutes of Health, nearly 40 million workers in the U.S. suffer from chronic low back pain. Organizations such as the Cleveland Clinic report that 80% of adults will have a bout of back pain at some point in their lives. In 2015, back pain accounted for almost 264 million lost work days, according to the [United States Bone and Joint Initiative](#).[🔗] Is it any wonder that back pain is one of most often cited health issues and one of the most searched-for health conditions on the internet?

In our new **Back Pain Toolkit** we will explore what causes back pain and how to fix it. Let's start with the hows and whys of back pain and function.

A Word About Back Pain

Back Pain, explained.

“Low back pain is very common, causing more global disability than any other condition.”

— Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control



Follow this checklist for safe lifting. 

Almost everyone has back pain at some time in their life. Often, the exact cause of the pain is unknown.

A single event may not have caused your pain. You may have been doing many activities, such as lifting the wrong way, for a long time. Then suddenly, one simple movement, such as reaching for something or bending from your waist, leads to pain.

Many people with chronic back pain have arthritis. Or they may have extra wear and tear of the spine, which may be due to:

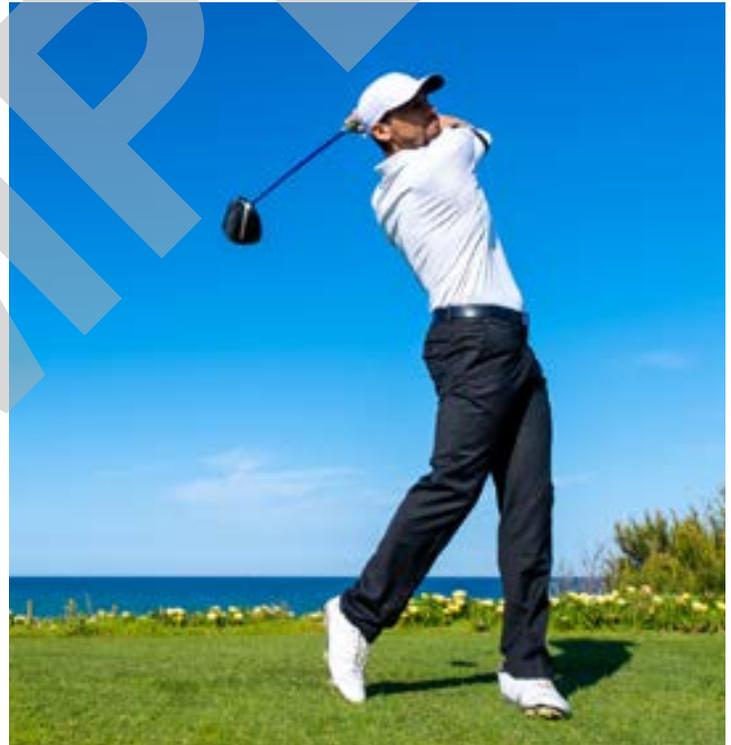
- Heavy use from work or sports.
- Injuries or fractures.
- Surgery.

You may have had a **herniated disk**, where part of the spinal disk pushes onto nearby nerves. Normally, the disks provide space and cushion in your spine. If these disks dry out and become thinner and more brittle, you can lose movement in the spine over time.

If the spaces between the spinal nerves and spinal cord become narrowed, this can lead to **spinal stenosis**. These problems are called degenerative joint or spine disease.

Other possible causes of chronic low back pain include:

- Curvature of the spine, such as **scoliosis** or **kyphosis**.
- Medical problems, such as **fibromyalgia** or **rheumatoid arthritis**.
- **Piriformis syndrome**, a pain disorder involving a muscle in the buttocks called the piriformis muscle.



You are at greater risk for low back pain if you:

- Are older than age 30.
- Are overweight or obese.
- Are pregnant.
- Do not exercise.
- Feel stressed or depressed.
- Have a job that includes heavy lifting, bending and twisting or involves whole body vibration, such as truck driving or using a sandblaster.
- Smoke. If you smoke, quit. Smokers are twice as likely to have back pain as nonsmokers. Smoking reduces the amount of oxygen-rich blood available for maintaining spinal health.

Some good news: You can relieve the vast majority of back pain issues with exercises and actions that you control as opposed to circumstances beyond your control. Many of the most common back issues have their root in our choices, such as not following proper lifting techniques, having poor posture or not building a strong supportive core through regular exercises. This toolkit gives you the necessary information to take control of your back health.

Note: The content for this toolkit is interactive. As you read through the sections, you will see **highlighted links:**  to additional information and resources. You can click on the **vocabulary highlighted in green** for more information on those particular topics as well. We recognize that not everyone may have the same level of interest in each topic. Our goal is to provide basic information on each page plus links to additional resources.

Anatomy of the Spine

The structure and function of the back.

“Take care of your body. It’s the only place you have to live.”

— Jim Rohn

The spine is complex. Pain may result from damage or injury to any of its various bones, nerves, muscles, ligaments and other structures.

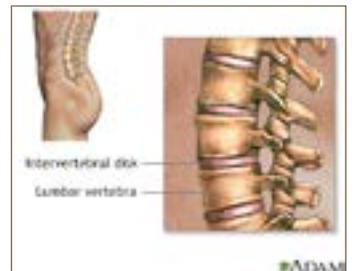
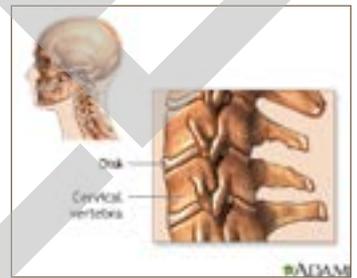
Vertebrae

The spine is a column of small bones, or **vertebrae**, that support the upper body. The column has three sections:

The **cervical (C) vertebrae** are the seven spinal bones that support the neck.

The **thoracic (T) vertebrae** are the 12 spinal bones that connect to the rib cage.

The **lumbar (L) vertebrae** are the five lower bones of the spinal column. A lot of the body’s weight and stress falls on the lumbar vertebrae.



Skeletal Spine

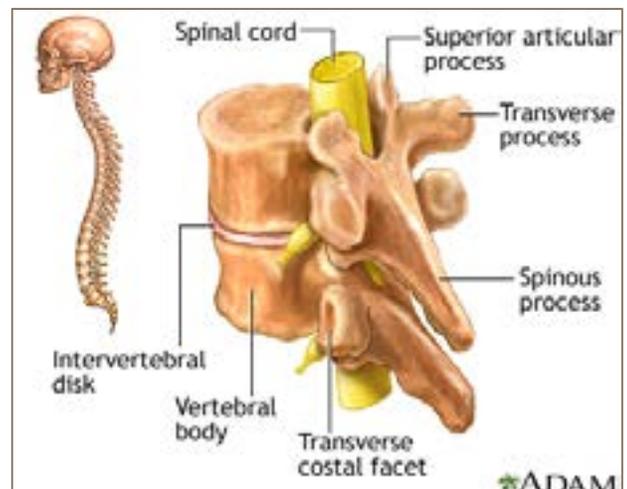
Below the lumbar region is the **sacrum**, a shield-shaped bony structure formed by fusion of five sacral (S) vertebrae. The sacrum connects with the pelvis at the sacroiliac joints. At the end of the sacrum are three to four tiny, partially fused coccygeal vertebrae known as the **coccyx**, or tailbone.

The Disks

Vertebrae in the spinal column are separated by small cushions of cartilage known as **intervertebral disks**. The disks rely on nearby blood vessels to keep them nourished.

Each disk is 80% water and contains two structures:

1. Nucleus pulposus — a central jelly-like substance inside each disk.
2. Annulus — a tough, fibrous ring that surrounds the nucleus pulposus.



Read more about tips for a healthy back. [📄](#)