A PAIN in the BACK?

Anyone can have back pain, but here are some things that increase your risk:

- **Getting older.** Back pain is more common the older you get. You may first have back pain when you are 30 to 40 years old.
- **Poor physical fitness.** Back pain is more common in people who are not fit.
- **Being overweight.** A diet high in calories and fat can make you gain weight. Too much weight can stress the back and cause pain.
- **Hereditry.** Some causes of back pain, such as ankylosing spondylitis, a form of arthritis that affects the spine, can have a genetic component.
- **Other diseases.** Some types of arthritis and cancer can cause back pain.
- **Your job.** If you have to lift, push, or pull while twisting your spine, you may get back pain. If you work at a desk all day and do not sit up straight, you may also get back pain.
- **Smoking.** Your body may not be able to get enough nutrients to the disks in your back if you smoke. Smoker’s cough may also cause back pain. People who smoke are slow to heal, so back pain may last longer.

POSSIBLE CAUSES

**Mechanical problems** with the back such as disk breakdown or rupture, spasms, or tense muscles.

**Injuries** from accidents or lifting heavy objects.

Back pain can also occur with certain infections, medical conditions or diseases, tumors or stress.

Acute pain starts quickly and lasts less than 6 weeks. It is the most common type of back pain.

Chronic pain lasts for more than 3 months and is much less common than acute pain.

WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR FOR PAIN?

You should see a doctor if you have:

- Numbness or tingling
- Severe pain that does not improve with rest
- Pain after a fall or an injury
- Pain plus any of these problems: trouble urinating, weakness, numbness in legs, fever, weight loss when not on a diet.

Most people with back pain do not need surgery. It is usually used if other treatments do not work.

You may need surgery if you have:

- Herniated disk
- Spinal stenosis
- Spondylolisthesis
- Vertebral fractures
- Degenerative disk disease

Hot or cold packs can soothe sore, stiff backs.

* Heat reduces muscle spasms and pain.
* Cold helps reduce swelling and numbs deep pain.

Using hot or cold packs may relieve pain, but does not fix the cause of chronic back pain.

CAN BACK PAIN BE PREVENTED?

The best things you can do to prevent back pain:

- Exercise often to keep your back muscles strong
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- To have strong bones, you need to get enough calcium and vitamin D every day.
- Try to stand up straight
- Avoid heavy lifting; if you do lift something heavy, bend your legs & keep your back straight.
- Learn to lift, push and pull in ways that protect your back.
- Eating a healthy diet and not smoking also help.

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