

# Back pain

## Back pain

### Overview

Back pain is one of the most common reasons people go to the doctor or miss work, and it is a leading cause of disability worldwide. Most people have back pain at least once.

Fortunately, you can take measures to prevent or relieve most back pain episodes. If prevention fails, simple home treatment and proper body mechanics often will heal your back within a few weeks and keep it functional. Surgery is rarely needed to treat back pain.

### Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of back pain can include:

- Muscle ache
- Shooting or stabbing pain
- Pain that radiates down your leg
- Pain that worsens with bending, lifting, standing or walking
- Pain that improves with reclining

### When to see a doctor

Most back pain gradually improves with home treatment and self-care, usually within a few weeks. If yours doesn't improve in that time, see your doctor.

In rare cases, back pain can signal a serious medical problem. Seek immediate care if your back pain:

- Causes new bowel or bladder problems
- Is accompanied by fever
- Follows a fall, blow to your back or other injury

Contact a doctor if your back pain:

- Is severe and doesn't improve with rest
- Spreads down one or both legs, especially if the pain extends below the knee
- Causes weakness, numbness or tingling in one or both legs
- Is accompanied by unexplained weight loss

Also, see your doctor if you start having back pain for the first time after age 50, or if you have a history of cancer, osteoporosis, steroid use, or excessive drug or alcohol use.