

Alameda Alliance for Health Back Pain



How to care for and prevent back pain

At Alameda Alliance for Health (Alliance), we are here to help you take charge of your health. You can use this guide to learn how to care for and prevent back pain. Work with your doctor to find out which treatment is best for you.

Back pain is a very common problem. It is often caused by moving the wrong way or overuse.

Back pain may feel like a dull, constant ache or a sudden, sharp pain. It can be acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term).

- **Acute** back pain can last from a *few days to a few weeks*. It is often caused by a fall or lifting something too heavy. It often gets better on its own, without any treatment.
- **Chronic** back pain lasts for *more than 3 months*. It is much less common than acute back pain. Most chronic back pain can be treated without surgery.



SELF-CARE

To get better quickly, take the right measures when you first feel pain.

- Stop activity that causes discomfort for only the first few days. **DO NOT** stay in bed. Staying in bed for more than 1 to 2 days can make the pain worse.
- Apply heat or ice to the painful area. Both can help.
- Take over-the-counter pain relievers (ibuprofen, acetaminophen, naproxen), if needed.
- Slowly start your normal activity after the first few days if you feel better. Your doctor or physical therapist can help you.

WHEN TO GET HELP

Call your doctor right away if you have:

- Bowel or bladder changes.
- Pain that has lasted longer than 4 weeks.
- Fever or chills.
- Been in the hospital recently.
- History of cancer, tuberculosis, or dialysis for end-stage renal disease.
- Pain caused by a severe blow, fall, or trauma.
- Weakness, numbness, or loss of movement of your arms or legs.
- Lost weight without trying.
- Pain that goes down your legs below the knee.



TREATMENT

Your doctor and other health care staff can help you manage your pain.

Treatment may include:

- A back brace to support your back.
- Cold/heat packs.
- Counseling to learn ways to understand and manage your pain.
- Physical therapy with stretching and strengthening exercises.
- Traction to stretch the spine using hands or tools.

Your doctor may also refer you for:

- Spinal manipulation (applies force to joints to relieve pain). This could be a chiropractor, osteopathic doctor, or physical therapist.
- Acupuncture (uses thin needles to relieve pain).

If needed, your doctor may prescribe medicines to help with your back pain. For pain that does not improve, your doctor may suggest other treatments like an injection or surgery.

Some people with back pain may also need job changes, job retraining, or occupational therapy.



YOU CAN PREVENT BACK PAIN

There are many things you can do to protect your back and avoid getting back pain.

- **Focus on good posture** when standing and sitting. Try not to stay in the same position for too long.
- **Follow workplace safety guidelines** and report any issues.
- **Get enough calcium and vitamin D** to keep your bones strong and prevent osteoporosis (weak bones).
- **Lift the right way** — with your legs, not your back.
- **Stay or get to a healthy weight** to reduce strain on your back.
- **Strengthen your back.** Be active for 30 minutes a day most days of the week. Do back exercises and stretches at least twice a week.

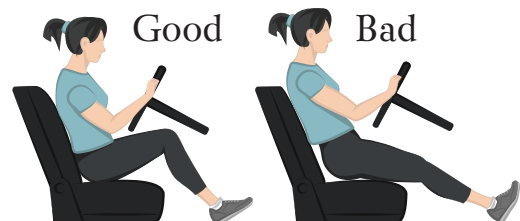
BACK PAIN DO'S AND DONT'S:

SITTING



Sit in chairs low enough to place both feet on the floor with knees higher than your hip. Don't slump or slouch forward. If you must sit for a long time, take frequent breaks to stand up and walk around.

DRIVING



Don't drive far back from the wheel. Move your car seat forward to keep knees bent and higher than your hips. Use a rolled up towel or pillow to support the lower part of your back if you are driving a long distance.

SLEEPING



Good



Bad

A firm mattress is good for your back. Sleep on your side with knees bent, or on your back with a pillow under your knees to keep them bent.

STANDING & WALKING



Good

Bad

Good

Bad

Don't stand in one position for too long. If you must stand for work, try resting one foot at a time on a stool. Walk with good posture. Do not wear high heels. Wear shoes with cushioned soles when walking.

Do you need more support?

Please call Alliance Health Programs

Monday – Friday, 8 am – 5 pm

Phone Number: **1.510.747.4577**

Toll-Free: **1.855.891.9169**

People with hearing and speaking impairments

(CRS/TTY): **711/1.800.735.2929**

www.alamedaalliance.org

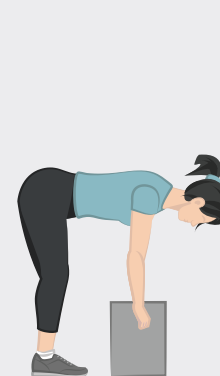
LIFTING



Good



Good



Bad



Bad

Get help to move or lift very heavy objects. When lifting, bend at your knees, not your waist. Do not bend forward or twist while lifting. Lift objects only chest high and hold objects close to your body.