

LOWER BACK PAIN

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Eighty percent of people suffer from back pain at some point in their lives. Back pain is the second most common reason for visits to the doctor's office, outnumbered only by upper-respiratory infections. In fact, it is estimated that low back pain affects more than half of the adult population each year and more than 10 percent of all people experience frequent bouts of low back pain.

The susceptibility of the low back to injury and pain is due to the fact that the low back, like the neck, is a very unstable part of the spine. Unlike the thoracic spine, which is supported and stabilized by the rib cage. This instability allows us to have a great deal of mobility to touch our toes, tie our shoes or pick something up from the ground, but at the cost of increased risk of injury.

As long as it is healthy and functioning correctly, the low back can withstand tremendous forces without injury. Professional powerlifters can pick up several hundred pounds off the floor without injuring their low back. However, if the low back is out of adjustment or has weakened supporting muscles, something as simple as taking a bag of groceries out of the trunk of their car, picking something up off the floor, or even simply bending down to pet the cat can cause a low back injury.

Until recently, researchers believed that back pain would heal on its own. We have learned, however, that this is not true. Recent studies showed that when back pain is not treated, it may go away temporarily, but will most likely return. It is important to take low back pain seriously and seek professional chiropractic care. This is especially true with pain that recurs over and over again. Contact our chiropractor . . . we can help!

The Causes of Low Back Pain

There are many different conditions that can result in low back pain, including: sprained ligaments, strained muscles, ruptured disks, trigger points and inflamed joints. While sports injuries or accidents can lead to injury and pain, sometimes even the simplest movements, like picking up a pencil from the floor, can have painful results. In addition, conditions such as arthritis, poor posture, obesity, psychological stress and even kidney stones, kidney infections, blood clots, or bone loss can lead to pain.

Due to the fact that there are a whole lot of things that can cause low back pain, and some of those things can be quite serious if left untreated, it is important to seek professional help. Chiropractors are the experts at diagnosing the cause and determining the proper treatment for low back pain. Here are some of the most common causes I see:

Subluxations

Whenever there is a disruption in the normal movement or position of the vertebrae, the result is pain and inflammation. In the lumbar spine, these usually occur at the transition between the lower spine and the sacrum. Subluxations can lead to debilitating low back pain. Fortunately, subluxations are easily treatable and often times a significant reduction in pain is experienced almost immediately after treatment.

Disc Herniations

Contrary to popular belief, a herniated disc does not automatically mean that you are going to suffer from low back pain. In fact, one study found that almost half of all adults had at least one bulging or herniated disc, even though they did not suffer any back pain from it. On the other hand, herniated discs can be a source of intense and debilitating pain that frequently radiates to other areas of the body. Unfortunately, once a disc herniates, they rarely, if ever, completely heal. Further deterioration can often be avoided through regular chiropractic care, but a complete recovery is much less common.

Sprains, Strains and Spasms

This is commonly the source of low back pain among the weekend warriors. You know, the type who have very little physical activity during the week, but once the weekend arrives, they push themselves way too much. By the end of the weekend, they are lying flat on their back counting down the hours before they can get in to see their chiropractor. Overworking the muscles or ligaments of the low back can lead to small tears in the tissues, which then become painful, swollen, and tight.

Stress

Whenever you become stressed, your body responds by increasing your blood pressure and heart rate, flooding your body with stress hormones and tightening up your muscles. When you are stressed all the time, the chronic tension causes your muscles to become sore, weak and loaded with trigger points. If you are stressed out all of the time and you have low back pain, it is important to do some relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing, as well as to get regular exercise.

Sciatica

Pain that radiates from your lower (lumbar) spine to your buttock and down the back of your leg is the hallmark of sciatica. Occasionally, sciatic pain in men is caused by sitting on a wallet.

The sciatic nerve is the longest nerve in your body. It runs from your pelvis, through your hip area and buttocks and down each leg. The sciatic nerve branches into smaller nerves as it travels down the legs providing feeling to your thighs, legs, and feet as well as controlling many of the muscles in your lower legs. The term *sciatica* refers to pain that radiates along the path of this nerve.

What Causes Sciatica?

Sciatica is actually a sign that you have an underlying problem putting pressure on a nerve in your lower back. The most common cause of this nerve compression is a bulging or herniated lumbar disc. Piriformis syndrome is another common cause of sciatica. The piriformis is a muscle that lies directly over the sciatic nerve. If this muscle becomes tight or if you have a spasm in this muscle, it puts pressure directly on the sciatic nerve. Occasionally, sciatic pain in men is caused by sitting on a wallet.

How do I Know if I Have Sciatica?

Pain that radiates from your lower (lumbar) spine to your buttock and down the back of your leg is the hallmark of sciatica. Sciatica may be accompanied by numbness, tingling, and muscle weakness in the affected leg. This pain can vary widely, from a mild ache to a sharp, burning sensation or excruciating discomfort. Sometimes it may feel like a jolt or electric shock. Sciatic pain often starts gradually and intensifies over time. It's likely to be worse when you sit, cough or sneeze.

How is Sciatica Treated?

The vast majority of the time, sciatic pain can be relieved through a combination of stretches, deep tissue massage of the piriformis muscle and chiropractic care. Occasionally, in cases where chronic spasm of the low back or piriformis muscles is causing the sciatic pain, it may be necessary to do a procedure called a trigger point injection, where a medical pain specialist injects a small amount of anesthetic directly into a spasmed muscle to break the spasm cycle. However, this is typically not necessary.

Treating Low Back Pain With Chiropractic

Chiropractic treatment for low back pain is usually pretty straightforward. Most commonly, it's simply a matter of adjusting the lower lumbar vertebrae and pelvis to re-establish normal motion and position of your bones and joints.

Chiropractic for the low back has been repeatedly shown to be the most effective treatment for low back pain. In fact, major studies have shown that chiropractic care is more effective, cheaper and has better long-term outcomes than any other treatment. This makes sense because chiropractic care is the only method of treatment that serves to re-establish normal vertebral motion and position in the spine. All other treatments, such as muscle relaxants, pain killers, and bed rest, only serve to decrease the symptoms of the problem and do not correct the problem itself.