

What **You** Should Know About Your **Acute Low Back Pain**

Facts about acute low back pain

- 'Acute' means the pain has lasted four to six weeks or less (if more, it may be 'subacute' or 'chronic')
- Low back pain is very common. Most of us will have some low back pain at some point in our lives
- Low back pain is most often caused by back strain and goes away within a few days or weeks without medical treatment
- Repeated episodes of low back pain are quite common
- The best way to prevent low back pain is to be physically active

When should I get professional help for my acute low back pain?

- When it's severe
- When it's getting worse
- When you're having trouble controlling your legs or bodily functions (bowel and bladder control)
- When you're over 50, but particularly over 65, and it is your first episode of severe low back pain

Who can help me?

- Family doctors
- Osteopathic physicians
- Chiropractors
- Nurse practitioners
- Physical therapists

Do I need x-rays, an MRI, or laboratory tests?

- Since most low back pain is caused by muscle or ligament strain, these tests will not show anything and so are not needed
- Your treating clinician will order tests only if the results could help you

What should I do?

- Keep moving! Staying active helps, and most acute low back pain will go away without treatment in four to six weeks
- Use heat and cold packs for the pain
- If needed, take acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g., Advil®, Motrin®) for the pain
- See a healthcare professional if the pain gets worse or if new symptoms appear

What should I not do?

- Don't stay in bed

What will help me recover?

- Remain active
- Slowly return to your usual activities (including work) as soon as you can. You may have to change your activities at the beginning if they make you feel worse
- Most people recover within four to six weeks without any specific treatment
- For more information, see the brochure "Acute Low Back Pain - So Your Back Hurts..." available at: <http://tinyurl.com/lowbackpaininfo>

Should I take pain medications?

- Many people don't take any pain medications for acute low back pain
- Over-the-counter medications (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen) can be effective. Take as directed on the label and ask your pharmacist, doctor, or prescribing practitioner if you have any questions about how much to take
- Your doctor may prescribe other medications if your pain interferes with your activity or is severe

When should I go back to my doctor or healthcare provider for my low back pain?

- If you don't improve after six weeks
- If your pain gets worse
- If you have new symptoms

