

What **You**
Should **Know**
About
Acute

Low Back Pain

Facts about acute low back pain:

- Low back pain is very common. Most of us will have an episode of low back pain at some point in our lives
- Low back pain is most often caused by back strain and resolves within a few weeks without medical treatment
- Emotional distress and depression can be caused by low back pain and make pain harder to deal with
- Recurrent or repeated episodes of low back pain are quite common
- The best way to prevent recurrences of low back pain is to be physically active

When should I seek professional help for acute low back pain?

- When it is severe
- When it is getting worse not better
- When you are having trouble controlling your legs or bodily functions (bowel & bladder control)
- When you are over 50, but particularly over 65 and it is your first episode of low back pain.

Who is qualified to evaluate me?

- Your general practitioner and physiotherapist, are trained to evaluate and treat people with acute low back pain.

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 reveal anything and are therefore not needed
- Your doctor will order tests if another cause of low back pain is suspected and can be verified by tests

What should I do?

- Keep moving! Staying active helps and most low back pain will go away without treatment in 4 to 6 weeks
- If needed take Paracetamol or anti-inflammatory medication (Ibuprofen, Naproxen) for the pain
- See a health care professional if the pain is getting worse instead of better or if new symptoms appear

What will help me recover?

- Research has shown that these actions speed recovery:
 - Remain active
 - Return to your usual activities (bit by bit) including work as soon as you can. You may have to modify your activities to start with if they make your pain worse
 - Supervised exercise may be helpful
- Most people recover within 4 to 6 weeks without any specific treatment

Should I take pain medications?

- Many people do not take any pain medicines for acute low back pain
- Paracetamol and anti-inflammatory medication (Ibuprofen) can be effective
- Your doctor can prescribe other medicines if your pain is interfering with activity or is severe
- Heat and cold packs are often helpful

When should I go back to my doctor?

- If you are not improving after 6 weeks
- If your pain is getting worse
- If you have any new symptoms