

Chronic Low Back Pain: What You Should Know

When is low back pain considered chronic?

When low back pain lasts for more than three months, it has become a chronic condition – meaning it's long lasting and usually more difficult to treat. In fact the longer you have the pain, the more likely it will be an ongoing problem. But there are many things you can do to improve your quality of life and get you 'back' to what you enjoy doing. The most significant thing to focus on is how you are functioning in your day-to-day life.

Do I need an x-ray or lab tests?

Most people with low back pain do not need imaging tests (like x-rays or MRIs) or lab tests.

What can I do to feel better?

- Keep active – try walking, group exercise or exercise in a pool. If you choose something you've enjoyed before, you're more likely to stick with it. It's best to start slowly and gradually increase your activity level. If any activity constantly worsens your pain, see your healthcare provider.
- Try activities and techniques that can help you cope with your pain – such as yoga, tai chi, massage and progressive relaxation.
- Above all, don't stay in bed! Bed rest can do more harm than good.

Should I use pain medication?

- Over-the-counter ibuprofen (e.g., Advil, Motrin) may be helpful.
- A muscle relaxant may be added to the ibuprofen for a week or so if you have a lot of muscle spasm.
- Stronger pain medication is rarely needed and is used at most for a few weeks.
- You might want to try a *frutescens cayenne* (capsicum) plaster or cream (a herbal medicine), but always talk to your healthcare professional before using it.

You may need to try a combination of approaches to manage your pain. As well, there may be rehabilitation and pain programs in your community that can help.

Where can I learn more about chronic low back pain?

Videos

Living Well with Chronic Low Back Pain <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B20hz2f2Sqk>

Low Back Pain <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOjTegn9RuY>

Booklet

Chronic Low Back Pain So Your Back Hurts... Learn what works, what doesn't, and how to help yourself <http://www.ihe.ca> (find the booklet using the search function)

Sources: (1) What You Should Know About Your Chronic Low Back Pain. Toward Optimized Practice, Institute of Health Economics, 2015.;

2) Chronic Low Back Pain: So Your Back Hurts... Learn what works, what doesn't. Toward Optimized Practice, Institute of Health Economics, 2015.