

Physician of Excellence



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OH, MY ACHING BACK!

Does that back pain require rest or Rx?

Back pain is a common ailment, affecting more than 80 percent of adults at any given time. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, most people experience back pain at some point in their lives – and 90 percent get better within a few weeks or respond well to non-surgical treatment, such as home care or physical therapy. But how does a person know if their aching back requires medication and rest, or surgery?

Back pain doesn't discriminate by age or fitness level, but most frequently strikes men and women between ages 30 and 50, due to the natural aging process as well as sedentary lifestyles and lack of exercise – or, too much exercise. Unfortunately, the risk of low back pain from disc disease or spinal degeneration increases with age.

Treatment Options

Most back pain can be resolved with non-surgical treatment. If these methods are unsuccessful, see your doctor for a medical evaluation. He or she may prescribe oral medications or physical therapy as a first step.

If conservative methods do not relieve your pain, surgery may be a treatment option – especially if other symptoms suggest problems with a spinal nerve. These symptoms include back pain that lasts longer than a few weeks, awakens you at night, or accompanies other symptoms such as muscle tightness and stiffness; severe leg pain; a tingling sensation in the leg; a change in bowel or bladder habits; or fever, chills and sweats.

A medical exam and imaging tests can diagnose the source of back pain. If your back pain requires surgery, the good news is, most spine surgery techniques are now minimally invasive, involving a smaller incision, less scarring and shorter recovery time. Both orthopaedic physicians and neurosurgeons perform spinal surgery.

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