

## **Back Pain Part 2**

By Dr. Donald Hudson

In a previous article, I discussed the general causes of back pain. As I said in that article, back pain is a major medical problem because it affects nearly all humans some time during their life. The basic structure of our back makes it unstable and subject to injury unless the supporting ligaments and muscles are kept healthy and strong. Your lower back, which carries most of your weight, is the site of most back pain. Injury to the low back frequently causes referred pain to other areas of the spine. Low back pain can have many causes, but some of the most common reasons are strains, sprains and spasms.

Strains and sprains may occur for many reasons, including improper lifting, excess body weight, and poor posture. They can occur with something as simple as carrying a heavy handbag or snoozing at an awkward angle. The injury to a muscle (strain) or a ligament (sprain) may be only a small injury. Your lower back is especially vulnerable to muscle strain because it is a pivot point for turning at the waist.

If you strain or sprain your back, you may feel pain immediately, or develop soreness and stiffness later. An injured muscle may be said “to knot up”. This muscle spasm is a common response to injury and designed to immobilize the painful, injured area and therefore prevent further damage. This is the body’s way of protecting your spinal cord and its branching nerves.

If you experience either strain or sprain injuries, you should stop or modify the activity that caused it for 1-3 days. Conservative treatment includes the use of Motrin or Advil 2 to 3 times daily as an anti-inflammatory, Tylenol as directed for pain management, and ice to the painful area for the next 1-3 days. After the pain has settled down, you can switch to the use of heat. Physical therapy and manipulation are also helpful treatments.

The problem with having back pain is that our back is a very complex structure, and although most back pains tend to occur because of a few common problems, there may be more complex reasons for pain to occur. Back pains that are not being improved by conservative treatments may need to be evaluated by a medical provider, who will take a detailed history and perform an examination. Your provider may require more detailed testing after this initial examination.

If you have used the conservation treatments for 1-3 weeks and you have either not improved, or you have gotten worse, you should discuss this with your medical provider.

Although osteoarthritis, herniated discs, osteoporosis, and fibromyalgia are causes of back pain, they are not the usual or common causes. I will go over the diagnosis and treatment, as well as the known causes and expected outcomes of these more uncommon causes of back pain in future articles.