

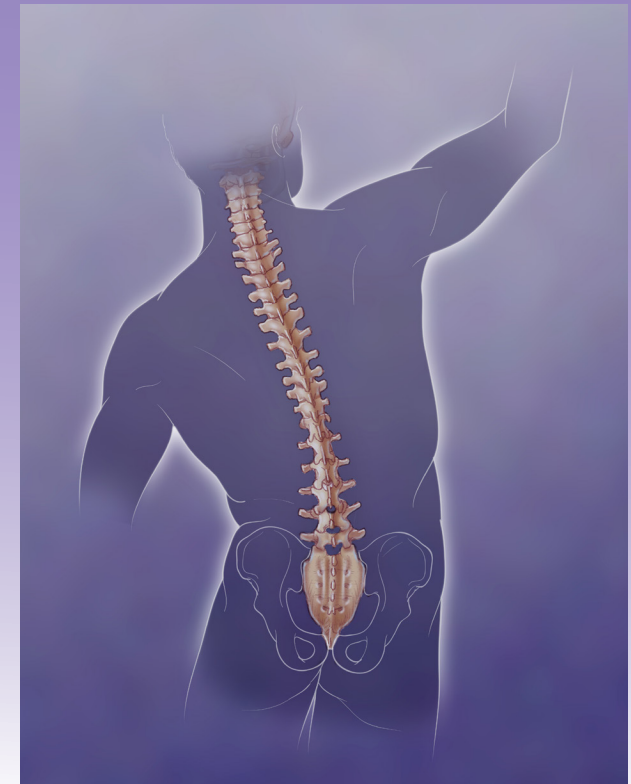
Spine Center



Beth Israel Deaconess  
Medical Center

According to the  
National Institutes of  
Health, about 80 percent  
of adults experience low  
back pain at some point  
in their lifetime.

## ALL ABOUT Low Back Pain



Spine Center



Beth Israel Deaconess  
Medical Center



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**Low back pain**, also called “acute” back pain, might feel like a continuous dull ache or a sudden sharp sensation that makes it extremely painful to even move. The pain is felt in the lower back, buttock, and/or upper thigh area.



The good news is the majority of people who suffer from low back pain do not have a serious problem causing the pain, and the pain is short term. It may last anywhere from just a few days to under six weeks.

## What causes low back pain?

Most low back pain is caused by normal wear and tear of the bones, joints, and discs as we age. In many cases, you may hear the term *spondylosis* used when referring to this process, which is the general—and normal—degeneration of the spine as we get older.

Specific problems that can contribute to low back pain might include sprains and strains, herniated or ruptured discs, sciatica, intervertebral disc degeneration, spinal stenosis, or skeletal irregularities.

No matter what is causing your low back pain, we will work with you to help identify and ease your pain.



## How is low back pain treated?

Most people feel better within six weeks with treatments that can be done at home. Contrary to previous practice, bed rest is not usually helpful and should be limited.

Common treatments recommended by your specialist may include:

- ✓ Carrying on with normal activities as much as possible and staying active
- ✓ Over-the-counter or prescribed medications, used only as directed by your provider
- ✓ Strengthening exercises and/or physical therapy programs
- ✓ Cold or hot packs that help reduce inflammation and ease the pain



There are several other treatment options for patients with low back pain. Contact your specialist if your symptoms aren't improving in 4-6 weeks after starting the recommended treatments.

*Please note:* avoid back braces as they can promote inactivity, debility, and long-term pain.

## Will I need an imaging test?

Most often, imaging tests (X-rays, MRIs, CT scans) are not recommended for patients within the first month of their low back pain. Within six weeks, most people feel better with or without any imaging tests. The tests can be costly and usually do not change the treatment of the problem. They also expose you to some radiation, although minimal. In addition, often the result of the imaging test doesn't help us understand what is causing your pain.

In most cases, if the pain has been going on for a month or less, our specialists will only recommend imaging tests under certain circumstances. Your specialist will ask you specific questions and determine the best approach to help you feel better.

Please remember to be patient during this challenging time. Most people who suffer from low back pain feel better within six weeks.

Our care team is committed to relieving your pain symptoms while providing you with the best possible experience.

If you have any questions, or your symptoms aren't improving, contact your specialist at the Spine Center at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center at **617-754-9000** or **[spinecenter@bidmc.harvard.edu](mailto:spinecenter@bidmc.harvard.edu)**.

For more information, visit us at **[www.bidmc.org/spinecenter](http://www.bidmc.org/spinecenter)**