WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT LOW BACK PAIN

Many people have low back pain at some time in their lives. Back pain is rarely caused by a serious health condition. It often gets better within a few days or weeks. Low back pain can become chronic, meaning that it comes and goes over months or years.

If you have low back pain:

• Do not lift heavy things or do strenuous activity.
• Try to keep doing everyday activities and walking, even if it hurts.
• Do not stay in bed longer than 1–2 days because it can make your recovery slower.

To help you feel better, try some of these things at home:

• Medicines from the drug store to reduce pain (acetaminophen or ibuprofen—read the labels).
• Heating pads or hot showers.
• Massage.

See a doctor if:

• Pain runs down the leg below the knee.
• The leg, foot, groin, or rectal area feels numb.
• Fever, nausea or vomiting, stomachache, weakness, or sweating occurs.
• Bowel or bladder control is lost.
• Pain was caused by an injury.
• Pain is so bad you cannot move around.
• Pain does not seem to be getting better after 2–3 weeks.

For More Information

www.annals.org/cgi/reprint/147/7/478.pdf
Patient summary of guideline from the American College of Physicians and the American Pain Society on the diagnosis and treatment of low back pain.

MedlinePlus.

www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/backpain/backpain.htm
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

Tool Kit
American Academy of Family Physicians (information available in English and Spanish).