

# Muscle Spasms and Back Pain

## Understanding Back Pain

Your back is composed of a spinal column (vertebrae), discs, spinal cord (and nerves), ligaments and muscles.

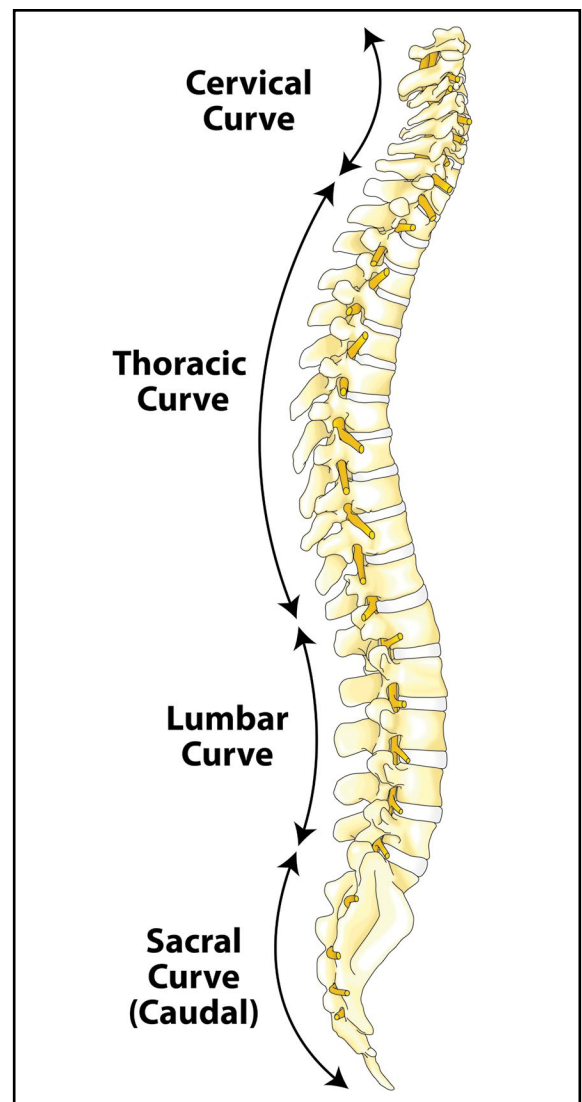
A back injury, spine disorder or disease may affect one or more of these parts. Some back pain occurs without a back injury, spine disorder or disease.

Often, low back pain is the result of years of smaller injuries to your spine such as:

- minor sprains and strains
- overuse (too much physical activity)
- underuse (too little physical activity)
- weakness
- poor posture
- stress
- working conditions.

In response to these smaller injuries, you may have muscle spasms. A **muscle spasm** is when a muscle in your body tightens beyond your control.

Muscle spasms in your back can put pressure on the nerves leading into and out of the spinal cord. This can cause severe pain.



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Labeled parts of your spinal column.

(over)

## What You Can Do

### ■ Do something active.

Walking, swimming, riding an exercise bike, dancing, yoga or gentle stretching are great ways to get your body moving to help lessen pain, stiffness and discomfort.

- Studies show that even if your pain is severe, staying in bed for more than 2 days can do more harm than good.
- Your recovery may be faster and more complete if you walk, do as many normal activities as possible and do the gentle exercises your health care provider prescribes.

### ■ Use cold or warm therapy.

Applying ice or a warming pad (whichever feels best) can help reduce pain, relax muscle spasms or both. You can also try taking a warm bath or shower if heat feels good.

When using cold or warm therapy:

- Use heat or cold for up to 30 minutes at a time. Wait 20 to 30 minutes before you apply it again.
- Do not sleep with a heating pad. It can burn your skin.

### ■ Try self-massage.

Gentle rubbing on the back can help to reduce pain, relax muscle spasms or both.

### ■ Take an over-the-counter pain medicine.

Over-the-counter pain medicines may reduce your pain. This type of medicine includes ibuprofen (Advil<sup>®</sup>, Motrin<sup>®</sup>), aspirin or naproxen (Aleve<sup>®</sup>) or acetaminophen (Tylenol<sup>®</sup>). Talk with your health care provider before starting any new medicine.

If you do not feel better after 1 to 2 weeks of self-care, your health care provider may prescribe physical therapy, chiropractic care, massage therapy or acupuncture.

## How to Prevent Muscle Spasms

There are some things you can do to help prevent muscle spasms. This includes:

- exercising regularly
- using good posture
- avoiding being in any one position for a long time
- getting enough rest
- managing your stress
- taking special care when lifting and using good form.

Talk with your health care provider if you have questions about how to prevent muscle spasms.