

Care for Spinal or Back Pain

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 a disease may affect one or more of these parts. Pain can greatly decrease your ability to work and enjoy life.

The following guidelines may help you cope with the pain.

Activity

- Exercise regularly. Regular exercise will keep your back muscles strong and flexible.
- Your health care provider will tell you when to start your exercises.
- Increase your activity slowly. Only do the activities you can tolerate.
- Take lots of walks. Gradually increase the distance you walk each day.
- Change your position often. This will help you feel better.
- Continue to log roll when you get in and out of bed.
- Use good posture. Poor posture puts stress on your spinal column.
- Take special care when lifting. Use good body mechanics. Ask for help with heavy objects.

- Get enough rest.
- Keep a good weight for you. Extra weight adds increased stress to your spine.
- Manage your stress. Stress at work or home can add to spinal pain.
- Don't smoke. Nicotine restricts the blood flow to the discs that cushion your spine. Ask your health care provider for help if you are ready to quit smoking.

Pain Control

Controlling your pain can promote healing.

- Expect to have bouts of pain. Pain will most likely occur when you increase your activity. When you feel pain, cut back on your activities and use ice, heat or relaxation exercises.
- Do not use alcohol while taking pain medicine.
- Do not drive when you are taking a prescription pain medicine. The medicine may make you drowsy.
- If your health care provider prescribes a mood-altering medicine (such as a muscle relaxant or narcotic pain medicine), it will be for a specific length of time.
- You should gradually use less pain medicine at home.

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- Other ways to control your pain include:
 - cold packs
 - heating pads
 - massage
 - whirlpool bath
 - relaxation exercises
 - rest and short walks.

Diet

- Eat a well-balanced diet with lots of fluids.
- Your prescription narcotic pain medicine may cause constipation. Eat lots of fresh fruit, raw vegetables and other foods rich in fiber.

When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you:

- have pain that is severe and not relieved by rest, cold, heat or pain medicine
- feel new or increased numbness, tingling or weakness in your arms or legs
- have loss of bowel or bladder function
- have any loss of feeling in your anal or genital area
- have any questions or concerns about your pain, medicines or treatment.