

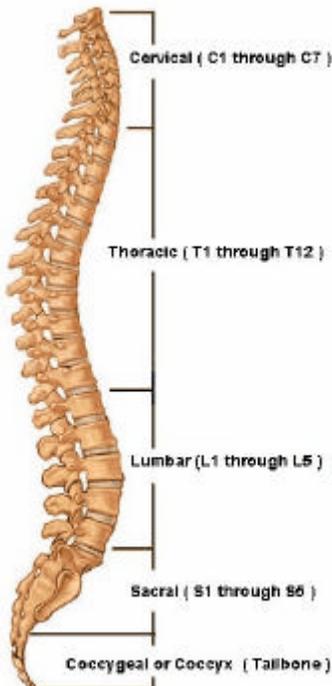
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Treating Back Pain

If you suffer from back pain, you're not alone: 80% of adults experience at least one painful back episode in their lifetimes, and low-back pain is the fifth-leading cause of doctor visits in the United States. Back injury is also the leading cause of work-related disability, costing the U.S. tens of billions of dollars annually in terms of lost productivity, medical expenses and workers' compensation benefits.

There are many potential reasons for back pain, most of them benign and self-healing. Often pain is mechanical in nature, the result of trauma to the lower back from such activities as sports, lifting, bending, or a sudden jolt as in a car accident. Such trauma can cause stress on spinal bones and tissues, which may take several days to weeks for the body to repair. Symptoms vary from dull aching in the muscles of the back to shooting or stabbing pain, limited flexibility and range of motion, even an inability to stand straight. Though the pain can be intense, it is still classified as acute or short-term back pain if it heals within a few weeks (or even months) and then is gone. According to the National Institute of Health, back pain is not considered chronic until it has persisted three or more months. Chronic back pain is often progressive and its origins may be hard to determine.

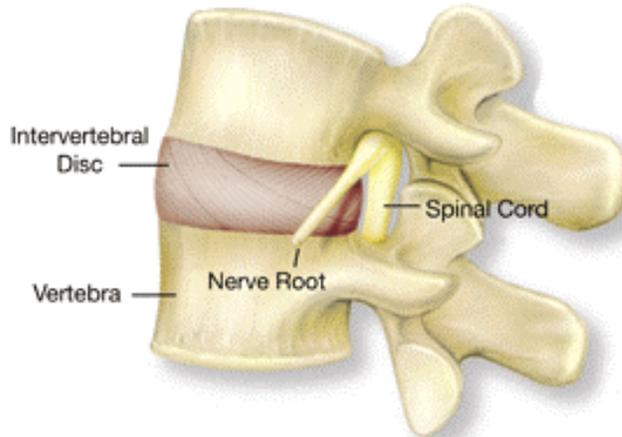


ANATOMY OF THE SPINE

The back is a fascinating composition of bones, muscles and other tissues that comprise the human torso from the neck to the pelvis. The spinal column supports the weight of the upper body and protects the spinal cord, the nervous system “wiring” that carries signals from the brain to the rest of the body and back, controlling movement and relaying sensations. More than 30 bones – vertebrae – form the spinal column, and each vertebra has a hole that allows the spinal cord to pass through. In adults the cord descends from the base of the brain and extends to just below the rib cage. The spinal cord reaches full length in early childhood but the spine itself continues to grow until the body reaches its full height. This means the nerve roots to the lower back and legs extend many inches down the spinal column before exiting. Ligaments and tendons hold the vertebrae in place and attach the muscles of the back to the spinal column. The spine has four regions:

- Seven cervical (neck) vertebrae (C1-C7)
- Twelve thoracic (upper back) vertebrae (T1-T12)
- Five lumbar (lower back) vertebrae (L1-L5) where most pain is felt
- The sacrum (S1-S5) and coccyx, which are bones fused together at the base of the spine.

Normal Spinal Segment



Many people have heard of “**slipped**” or “**ruptured**” discs. Intervertebral discs are spongy circles of cartilage that act as “spacers” between the vertebrae. They allow for flexibility of the lower back and work as shock absorbers, cushioning the bones throughout the spine as the body moves. A “bulging” disc (also known as slipped, protruding, herniated or ruptured disc) can be caused by trauma or by the very process of aging. The discs are under constant pressure. When they degenerate, cartilage can bulge into the area of the spinal cord or against a nerve root, resulting in pain. Most herniated discs occur in the lumbar portion of the back.

Sciatica happens when a herniated or ruptured disc puts pressure on the sciatic nerve. This is a large nerve that goes all the way down the spinal column to an exit point in the pelvis, carrying nerve fibers to the legs. Sciatica can cause “shocking” or “burning” low back pain, pain through the buttocks and down one leg to below the knee, even reaching as far as the foot. In extreme cases when the nerve is “pinched” the pain is replaced by numbness and even loss of motor control as the nerve signal is interrupted.

Wear and tear on the discs can lead to **spinal degeneration** and a narrowing of the spinal canal. Someone with spinal degeneration might have a stiff back on awakening or may feel pain after long periods of walking or standing. Also **spinal stenosis**, a congenital narrowing of the spinal canal, predisposes some people to disc disease.

There are many other conditions that cause back pain, some related to skeletal irregularities, some to infection or inflammation of spinal joints, still others attributed to disorders such as **fibromyalgia**, which can cause widespread musculoskeletal pain and “tender points” along the spine.

WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE

Most back pain resolves itself within a few weeks. In rare cases, though, back pain can be a sign of a serious medical problem. You should see a doctor if the pain:

- Feels constant or intense, especially at night
- Spreads down one or both legs
- Causes weakness, numbness or tingling in one or both legs
- Causes bladder or bowel problems
- Is accompanied by abdominal pain or throbbing
- Is the result of a fall or a blow to your back
- Is accompanied by unexplained weight loss
- If you’re over 50 and have a history of back pain or cancer

Most back pain responds extremely well to acupuncture treatment, herbs and herbal plasters. A high percentage of success in treating both acute and chronic back pain has kept the clinic very busy. When the meridian signals at all levels of the spine are restored, the body heals itself naturally without need of surgical intervention or strong pain pills. Normally, three to six treatments for back pain allow patients to reach 80% improvement and recovery. Of all the patients with back pain who enter the clinic as a “last resort” before surgery, fewer than 10% require surgery after acupuncture and herbal treatment.

Several herbal formulas are indicated in the treatment of back pain. These formulas enhance and enforce the acupuncture treatments, while herbal plasters help with recovery of localized soft tissue injuries. Commonly used herbal formulas are Tian Qi Du Zhong Wan, Jin Gin Die Da Wan, Te Xia Jing Zhui Tong Wan, Zuo Gu Shen Jing Tong Wan, Feng Shi Xiao Tong Wan and Du Huo Ji Sheng Wan. Health food stores offer MSM and Glucosamine Chondroitin, which seem to aid in back recovery. The recent discovery of Hyaluronic Acid (HA) also seems to offer promise in treatment of back pain.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION...

Of course, it's best to avoid back pain in the first place. Some tips for a healthier back:

- **Exercise.** Strong abdominal and back muscles act together as a natural brace for your spine. Flexibility in the hips and thighs allows for proper pelvic alignment, which, in turn, improves the posture of the back.
- **Stand Smart. Sit Smart. Lift Smart.** Keep the load off your lower back by maintaining a neutral pelvic position when you stand – don't push your hips either forward or back. When you sit, choose a chair with lumbar support and arm rests. Try placing a pillow or rolled towel at the small of your back to take the pressure off it. When you lift, keep your back upright and bend at the knees. Don't lift and twist at the same time!
- **Quit Smoking.** Yet another reason to avoid smoking: smokers have low oxygen levels in their spinal tissues, which greatly slows the healing process.
- **Watch Your Weight.** Excess weight strains the back muscles. A healthy weight is a step toward a healthy back.

THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS

The clinic's expenses have ballooned over the past few years – rent, utilities, and equipment all have gone up in price. So, too, have the herbs, teas and plasters we offer. Unfortunately, insurance payments to providers have not kept pace with inflation. The clinic is therefore adjusting fees and prices for 2005 as follows:

- Acupuncture treatment: \$79
- Standard herbs: \$19
- Plasters: \$10
- Chiro-Klenz Tea (1 box): \$16

We appreciate your understanding and look forward to keeping you healthy in the New Year!

