

Physical Therapy and Low Back Pain

At any given time, about 25% of people in the United States report having low back pain within the past 3 months. In most cases, low back pain is mild and disappears on its own. For some people, back pain can return or hang on, leading to a decrease in quality of life, or even to disability.

If your low back pain is accompanied by the following symptoms, you should visit your local emergency department immediately:

- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Numbness in the groin or inner thigh

There are 3 different types of low back pain:

- Acute – pain lasting less than 3 months
- Recurrent – acute symptoms come back
- Chronic – pain lasting longer than 3 months.

HOW A PHYSICAL THERAPIST CAN HELP

Physical therapists can teach you how to use the following strategies to prevent back pain:

- Use good body positioning at work, home, or during leisure activities.
- Keep the load close to your body during lifting.
- Ask for help before lifting heavy objects.
- Maintain a regular physical fitness regimen—staying active can help to prevent injuries.

If you are having low back pain right now:

- Stay active, and do as much of your normal routine as possible (bed rest for longer than a day can actually slow down your recovery).
- If your pain lasts more than a few days or gets worse, schedule an appointment to see your physical therapist.

Not all low back pain is the same, so your physical therapist will design an individualized treatment plan for your specific back problem. Treatments may include:

- Manual therapy
- Specific strengthening and flexibility exercises
- Education
- Training for proper lifting, bending, and sitting; for doing chores both at work and in the home; and for proper sleeping positions
- Assistance in creating a safe and effective physical activity program
- Use of ice or heat treatments or electrical stimulation to help relieve pain

