

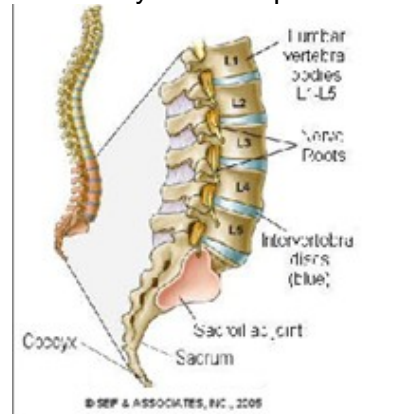
Helpful information provided by the Department of Emergency Medicine

## Back Pain (Lumbo-Sacral Strain)

You have been seen for back pain. Back pain is common and is second only to headaches as a cause of pain. If you have previously had x-rays, your provider will determine if bony injury may be the cause of your pain.

Your *spinal column* (backbone) is made up of 24 main vertebral bodies in addition to the sacrum and coccyx. These are held together by tough fibrous tissue called ligaments, and also by the support of your muscles. Nerve roots pass through the openings between the vertebrae. A sudden wrenching move or injury to the back may cause injury to, or pressure upon these nerves. This may result in localized back pain or *radiation* (movement) of pain into the buttocks and down the leg into the foot. The condition known as *sciatica* (a sharp, shooting pain from the buttock down the back of the leg) is frequently associated

with a ruptured (*herniated*) disc. Pain is also created by muscle spasm alone.



### HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS:

**Avoid an underactive life style. Active exercise, as directed by your caregiver, is your greatest weapon against back pain.** Hard physical activities such as tennis, racquetball, water skiing etc., without proper physical conditioning, may aggravate and/or create problems, especially if you are not in condition for that activity. If you have a back problem it is especially important to avoid sports requiring sudden body movements. Swimming and walking are generally safer activities. Maintain good posture. Avoid obesity.

Use bed rest for only the most extreme, *acute* (sudden) episode. Prolonged bed rest over 48 hours will aggravate your condition. Ice used for acute conditions is very effective. Use a large plastic bag filled with ice and wrapped in a towel. This also provides excellent pain relief. This may be continuous or for thirty minutes every two hours during acute phase, then as needed. Heat for thirty minutes prior to activities is helpful.

*See your caregiver for continued problems.* Your caregiver can help or refer you for appropriate exercises and work hardening. Work hardening means that the back is put through the proper exercises and rehabilitation to treat the present problems and prevent future problems. With conditioning, most back problems can be avoided. Sometimes a more serious issue may be the cause of back pain and you should be seen immediately again if new problems seem to be developing.

### SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- You have numbness, tingling, weakness, or problem with the use of your arms or legs.
- You experience severe back pain not relieved with medications.
- There is a change in bowel or bladder control.
- You have increasing pain in any areas of the body, including your stomach or abdomen.
- You notice shortness of breath, dizziness or fainting.
- You have *nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach), vomiting or sweats.
- Discoloration of your toes or your legs or feet get very cold.