

# Strategies for Managing Neck and Back Pain

Back and neck pain are extremely common, Back pain alone affects more than 80 percent of people at some point in their lives. Injuries to muscles can cause pain, as can discs in the spine pressing on nerves.

*“Different kinds of movements such as lifting, twisting, or bending can put pressure on the spine and cause pain, especially if they’re forceful and sudden. The same goes for trauma like car accidents.”*

Other causes of pain include Arthritis, and spinal narrowing called Stenosis. Having depression or anxiety can make the problem worse. To diagnose your pain, your health care provider will examine your back and your posture and may do neurological tests such as checking your reflexes. You’ll also be asked questions about your pain, including: Where is it located? How intense is it? How long have you had it? Was it triggered by an event such as a fall or accident?

In some cases, blood tests or imaging tests may be done if an underlying condition is suspected of causing the pain.

*“Based on the information from the examination and tests, we can get a better idea of what’s causing the pain and come up with a plan to treat it.”*

As for what you can do, rest but avoid sitting or lying in bed for long periods of time. Get up and move as soon as you can. Walking and other gentle activities will keep your muscles limber. Apply an ice pack for the first few days after the injury to bring down swelling and pain. Then switch to heat, which promotes blood flow and relaxes muscles. For back pain, a lumbar support device or back brace may help.

Over-the-counter pain relievers such as Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen can also provide relief. Ask your provider what dose to take, and for how long to take it.

*“Neck and back pain generally should get better within a few weeks with home care however, if it doesn’t get better within the few weeks as we expect or it gets worse, then we have you come back in to be reevaluated and likely will need to be sent for physical therapy to help improve muscle tone and strength.”*

Seek immediate medical attention if your pain gets worse or spreads; you have numbness or weakness in your arms or legs; lose control over your bladder or bowels; have trouble walking; or develop a fever.

*“How quickly your pain improves depends on what caused it. Most people feel better within a week or two. If it’s not getting better or you have any concerns, it’s always a good idea to contact your health care provider.”*