



Back pain is one of the most common reasons people seek medical care. It will affect approximately three in four adults during their lifetime. When doctors speak about “back pain” they are referring to pain that originates in the spine anywhere between the upper and lower back.

There are many different types of pain. *Acute back pain* is defined as severe but lasting a short period of time. *Chronic back pain* usually occurs every day. It can be severe, but may be characterized as mild, deep, achy, burning, or electric-like. Back pain that travels into another part of the body, such as the leg may be considered radicular pain, particularly when it radiates below the knee. This scenario is commonly called a *lumbar radiculopathy*. Fortunately, not all occurrences of back pain include leg pain.

It is not unusual for back pain to be accompanied by other symptoms, such as numbness and tingling sensations, stiffness, achiness, and weakness. Certain activities may increase or aggravate back pain. Sitting, walking, standing, bending over, and twisting at the waist are a few of the movements that can make back pain worse. Of course, that is not true for every patient. Rather, it depends on what level of the spine is affected and the diagnosis, or cause.

Back pain in "Doctor-Speak": During consultation for back pain, your doctor may use terms such as thoracic, lumbar, lumbosacral, or sacrum. The point is, back pain is a large topic covering many different regions (or levels) of the spine.

- Thoracic spine is the upper and mid back areas, and where your ribs attach to the spinal column.
- Lumbar refers to your low back.
- Lumbosacral is the low back, sacrum, and possibly the tailbone (called the coccyx).
- Sacrum is the part of the spine that is at the back of your pelvis.

Back pain is a big topic because between the upper back and tailbone, there are 17 vertebral bodies, many joints, the sacrum and tailbone, plus fibrous and muscular supporting structures, intervertebral discs, spinal cord and nerve roots, and blood vessels. A simple injury, such as a back sprain/strain from lifting and twisting simultaneously, can cause immediate and severe pain that is typically self-limiting.

Of course, not all incidences of back pain are injury or trauma-related. Many back problems are congenital (found at birth), degenerative, age-related, disease-related, and may be linked to poor posture, obesity or an unhealthy lifestyle such as smoking. There are two instances in which emergency medical care is needed:

- 1) Bowel and/or bladder dysfunction
- 2) Progressive weakness in the legs

Fortunately, these conditions are rare.

Read more about back pain at www.spineuniverse.com