

Serious Back Pain

Question: My back hurts at times for no reason. When do I need to worry about a more serious problem?

Back pain is an extremely common problem. Eighty percent of you will experience low back pain at some point in your life.

Many times back pain will go away by itself. If it doesn't, this is when you should seek care.

In our office, we have a treatment goal. We want to see you improve 50-90% in 4-6 weeks. If you do not respond within a reasonable time, it now becomes necessary to do more testing.

Typically, an MRI is indicated for those that have not improved. This is an excellent test for looking at the disc, spinal cord and nerves. This test will tell us if you have a disc problem, bone infection, cancer, spinal cord tumor or small fractures in your spine.

If chiropractic care has not helped and the MRI does not explain your pain your pain, a second opinion is probably in order.

There are red flags that immediately cause concern. These include:

1. Recent bowel or bladder problems. These may be signs of a disc pinching onto nerves that control these organs. It also may indicate tumors in your spine.
2. Recent fever or chills. It is possible to have an infection in your spine, making you ill.
3. Have you had cancer before? If so, cancer may spread to your spine, causing back pain.
4. Are you losing weight without trying? Again, cancer may cause this or something unrelated such as thyroid problems.
5. Does pain wake you up at night from a deep sleep? Again, we need to consider cancer as a possibility.
6. Have you had significant trauma, such as a bad fall or car accident? X-rays can miss small fractures, which will cause pain if not treated properly.
7. Muscle weakness in your arm or leg. This may indicate pinched nerves, spinal cord tumors or diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis.

Doctors of Chiropractic are trained to properly evaluate and diagnose your back pain. This includes taking your history, performing an examination and taking x-rays. It is our responsibility to have a proper diagnosis. If this is not possible with only exam and x-rays, it is time to move on to a CT, MRI or another opinion.

In our office, 80-90% of our patients respond as expected. Less than 10% require more advanced testing, treatment or second opinions.

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