

MYTH vs FACT: Acute Low Back Pain

Most low back pain is common and gets better within a few weeks.

The good news is that most people start to feel better within a few weeks, often with simple care and time

Myth vs. Fact

MYTH: I need an MRI right away.

FACT: Most people do not need an MRI early on. It usually does not change treatment or help you get better faster.

MYTH: My pain must mean something serious.

FACT: Even strong pain is usually not dangerous. Most back pain improves with time.

MYTH: If I'm in a lot of pain, it must be something serious.

FACT: Most acute low back pain is not caused by a serious condition and often improves with time and basic care.

MYTH: Stronger medicine (like opioids) works best.

FACT: Opioids are not the first choice for most back pain. They carry risks like misuse, overdose, and side effects.

MYTH: I should stay in bed until I feel better.

FACT: Too much rest can slow healing. Gentle movement helps you recover.

MYTH: If an MRI shows something, that's the cause of my pain.

FACT: Many findings are normal with aging and may not be causing your pain.

Self-care options for low back pain

Try these simple steps to feel better:

- Stay active (short walks, light movement)
- Use heat or ice
- Try gentle stretching
- Use over-the-counter pain relief if appropriate
- Practice good posture
- Adjust your sleep position for comfort

Questions to ask your healthcare provider

- Do I really need an MRI now, or can I wait?
- What can I do at home to help my back heal?
- Are there non-opioid options for my pain?
- If I take an opioid, how long should I use it?
- How should I safely store or dispose of medications?

When to seek care right away

Call your healthcare provider if you have:

- Trouble controlling bladder or bowels
- Severe or worsening weakness or numbness
- Fever or recent serious injury
- Pain that is getting worse, not better

Helpful resources

- Talk with your healthcare provider about safe pain options
- FDA: www.fda.gov
- MedlinePlus: medlineplus.gov

Key message

Most low back pain improves.

You may not need an MRI, and opioids are often not the safest option. Talk with your healthcare provider about the best plan for you.