

BACK PAIN CHECK-IN: Should I Be Concerned?

HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD THIS PAIN?

- ☐ Less than 6 weeks > Likely acute pain
- ☐ 6–12 weeks > Still considered acute/subacute/persistent pain
- ☐ More than 12 weeks > May be chronic pain

Why this is important: Most back pain improves within a few weeks—even without intensive treatment.

WHAT DOES THE PAIN YOU ARE EXPERIENCING FEEL LIKE?

- ☐ Dull or aching
- ☐ Sharp or stabbing
- ☐ Comes and goes
- ☐ Constant
- ☐ Numbness or burning
- ☐ Radiates (travels down leg or arm)
- ☐ Worse with movement or certain positions

Why this is important: Understanding the pain you're experiencing will help guide what kind of care you need and how to communicate it with a health professional.

WHERE IS THE PAIN?

- ☐ Neck/Upper Back
- ☐ Mid-back
- ☐ Lower back (lumbar)
- ☐ Tailbone/Sacral area
- ☐ Radiates into buttock, hip, or leg
- ☐ Multiple areas

Why this is important: Location matters – treatment for lower back pain differs significantly from neck or mid-back pain. Telling your provider exactly where it hurts helps them examine the right area and choose the right approaches to diagnosis and treat your pain.

PLEASE RATE THE “AVERAGE OR USUAL” PAIN YOU ARE EXPERIENCING TODAY ON A SCALE OF 0 “NO PAIN” TO 10 “WORST PAIN.”

- ☐ 0 = No Pain
- ☐ 1 – 3 = Mild
- ☐ 4 – 6 = Moderate
- ☐ 7 – 9 = Severe
- ☐ 10+ = Worst Imaginable

PLEASE RATE THE “AVERAGE OR USUAL” PAIN YOU EXPERIENCED OVER THE PAST WEEK ON A SCALE OF 0 “NO PAIN” TO 10 “WORST PAIN.”

- ☐ 0 = No Pain
- ☐ 1 – 3 = Mild
- ☐ 4 – 6 = Moderate
- ☐ 7 – 9 = Severe
- ☐ 10+ = Worst Imaginable

Why this is important: Selecting a number that best represents the amount of pain or level of pain helps your provider understand how much pain you have and whether your pain is improving over time.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE CAUSED IT?

- ☐ Lifting something heavy
- ☐ Sudden movement or strain
- ☐ Sitting for long periods
- ☐ Poor posture
- ☐ Recent injury or fall
- ☐ Not sure—it came on gradually

Why this is important: Sometimes there's a clear cause for your pain. Other times, pain can develop over time without known cause.

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HAVE YOU TRIED ANYTHING TO RELIEVE IT?

- ☐ Rest or activity modification
- ☐ Over-the-counter pain relief
- ☐ Heat or ice
- ☐ Stretching or light movement
- ☐ Physical therapy exercises

Why this is important: Staying active (within comfort) is often more helpful than not moving around or staying active.

IS THE PAIN YOU'VE BEEN EXPERIENCING IMPROVING?

- ☐ Yes, getting better
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ No, getting worse

Why this is important: If you notice that pain is improving over time, it's often a good sign. If not, it may be time to check in with a provider.

HOW IS PAIN AFFECTING YOUR DAILY LIFE

Check any activities that pain is making difficult:

- ☐ Getting dressed or personal care
- ☐ Sleeping through the night
- ☐ Sitting for more than 20-30 minutes
- ☐ Driving or riding in a vehicle
- ☐ Working (at a desk, standing, or physical labor)
- ☐ Household tasks (cooking, cleaning, shopping)
- ☐ Exercise or recreational activities
- ☐ Mood, concentration, or mental well-being

Why this is important: How pain affects your daily function or activities is often more meaningful to your provider than the pain number alone. It helps them gauge severity, set realistic goals, and measure your progress at follow-up visits. It's also okay to mention if pain affects your mood, anxiety and depression are common with persistent pain, and your provider can help.

WHEN SHOULD YOU CONSIDER SEEING A DOCTOR?

Check any that apply:

- ☐ Pain lasts longer than a few weeks
- ☐ Pain interferes with daily activities or sleep
- ☐ Pain keeps coming back
- ☐ You're unsure what's causing it
- ☐ You want guidance on safe treatment options

YOUR NEXT STEP

If you're unsure, start with a primary care provider or a qualified health professional. If symptoms are severe or worsening, seek care right away.

When should you seek urgent care or go to the Emergency Room (ER)?

Get immediate medical help if you have:

- ☐ Severe or worsening pain after an injury
- ☐ Numbness, tingling, or weakness (especially in legs)
- ☐ Loss of bladder or bowel control
- ☐ Fever with back pain
- ☐ Unexplained weight loss with pain

These could be signs of a more serious condition.

The following checklist should be used to help with information about the pain you are experiencing. This information can be useful to both you and your health care provider. Consider completing this checklist:

- Prior to any appointments with your health care provider
- To communicate information about your pain to your health care provider
- Between visits with your health care provider to track how you are doing over time and if your pain is improving

