Back Pain Prevention & Treatment

By Christina Cusic, MD, MPH

About 80% of people experience back pain at some point in their lives. Back pain is a very common condition we treat every day in our clinics. Although the vast majority of back pain cases improve in four to six weeks, this time period is fraught with problems, notably minimized ability to work and carry on with daily activities. Here are the typical treatment methods:

**Ice and heat:** Apply ice for 15 minutes three times per day for the first two days to reduce inflammation then use heat thereafter to improve blood flow and muscle relaxation.

**Medications:** Anti-inflammatories (ibuprofen, naproxen) can help with pain and inflammation. Use Tylenol if you have history of ulcers. Muscle relaxants may be prescribed.

**Physical Therapy:** May be required if no improvement in two weeks. Exercise and core strength are important for long term prevention of low back pain.

**Steroid injections:** May alleviate nerve irritation caused by sciatica or disc herniation.

**Bed rest is to be avoided!**

Since the recurrence rate is high, prevention strategies are essential. Here’s what we recommend:

**Walking breaks:** Prolonged sitting puts strain on your spine. Stretch or take walking breaks every hour, stand during conversations, set cell phone reminders.

**Eliminate unbalances:** Evaluate work station for imbalances such as half of chair resting on thick pad, wallet in back pocket, or cradling phone between head and shoulder.

**Ergonomics:** Good posture keeps body weight aligned and reduces stress on low back muscles and spine. Use a chair that supports the natural curves of spine or use lumbar support. Rest feet on floor or footrest. Tilt computer monitor to avoid poor neck posture.

**Resting posture:** Lie on back with pillow under knees or on side with pillow between legs to reduce stress on low back.

**Core strengthening:** Strong back, abdominals, and gluteals are essential for support and stabilization of the spine. Try abdominal crunch or back extensions.

**Weight loss:** Reduces stress on spine and discs.

**Stress reduction:** Excess stress and fatigue can cause muscle spasms.

**Exercise:** Daily exercise can reduce stress and strengthen core.

**Proper lifting:** Clear a path, lift close to body, feet shoulder-width apart, bend knees, keep back straight, don’t twist or bend, keep eyes up, tighten abdominal muscles, lift with legs.
Certain symptoms (e.g. unexplained weight loss, constant pain, night sweats) should trigger a visit to a physician. If any of your employees are treating with us for a back injury and you have questions, please let us know.

**Want the Ability to Direct Employees to our Clinics for Work Injury Care?**

You can with our Workers’ Compensation Case Management service.

If one of your employees gets hurt on the job, you can rely on HealthPartners Occupational Medicine to make sure they get the right care. But did you know Nurse Case Management is an option? Our Worksite Health Department offers a certified workers’ compensation case management plan. Because the plan is certified, Minnesota law allows employers to designate which clinic(s) their employees must go to for first work injury visits. Follow-up visits must be within our HealthPartners network. This comprehensive approach dovetails nicely with our injury care service when the employer designates HealthPartners Occupational Medicine as the clinics where employees must be treated.

You may engage the nurse case management tool as you see fit; detailed, hands-on involvement with every step of the employee’s recovery to a higher level of engagement with only more complex cases. A key element of the management is ensuring employees make and keep appointments for specialists, MRI, etc.

Our comprehensive and coordinated approach will:

- Get employees back to work quickly and reduce lost work time
- Ensure that employees get the right care from the right providers
- Avoid prolonged disabilities
- Ensure best care and results with corresponding cost reductions. Our studies have demonstrated a $4 return for every $1 spent on case management.

Key features helping to accomplish these results include:

- Understanding of OSHA recordability and its implications
- Routine faxing of workability letters to designated company contact(s)
- Accessible CareLineSM service 24/7
- Ability to direct care to designated clinic(s)
- Focused provider networks; reduced use of QRC services
- Experienced nurse case managers

For more information contact Kirk Hyatt at **952-541-2619.**

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**Occupational Medicine & Urgent Care Locations**

**HealthPartners Clinic – Riverside**
2220 Riverside Ave S
Minneapolis, MN 55454
952-883-6999 Opt. 1

**HealthPartners Clinic – St. Paul**
205 S. Wabasha St
St. Paul, MN 55107
952-883-6999 Opt. 2

**HealthPartners Clinic – West**
5100 Gamble Dr, Ste 100
St. Louis Park, MN 55416
952-883-6999 Opt. 3

**HealthPartners RiverWay Clinic – Anoka**
601 Jacob Ln
Anoka, MN 55303
952-883-6999 Opt. 5