



How to Prevent Back Pain

If you've ever suffered from back pain, this checklist is for you. Here's what you can do to help prevent aches in the future, and when you should see a doctor:

How to Prevent Back Pain

- Watch how and where you sleep.** Mattresses should be supportive. Avoid sleeping on your stomach, as it puts pressure on your back. Instead, sleep on your back or side.
- Exercise regularly.** Strengthening your muscles and core reduces strain on your back, so incorporate exercise into your daily routine.
- Maintain a healthy weight.** If you're overweight, dropping just a few pounds can ease pain in your back.
- Maintain good posture.** Slouching exaggerates the natural curves in your back and can lead to muscle fatigue and injury.
- Avoid heavy lifting.** If you need to lift something heavy, let your legs do the work. Bend your knees and keep your back straight when you lift.
- Wear good shoes.** High heels and worn-out shoes may contribute to back pain. Wear supportive shoes that are in good condition.
- Relax.** Stress can cause muscle tension and create pain in the back and neck. Try meditation or relaxation techniques to alleviate stress.
- Stop smoking.** As if there weren't enough reasons to ditch the habit, the *American Journal of Medicine* found that smokers were more likely to suffer from lower-back pain than nonsmokers.

When to See a Doctor

- If a trauma such as a fall or an accident caused your back pain
- If numbness or tingling accompany your back pain
- If you have loss of bladder or bowel function in addition to your back pain
- If pain is excruciating
- If pain doesn't go away within three to four days