



The state-of-the-art Spine Center at UMass Memorial offers a wide range of treatment modalities to help you manage your back pain.

We are dedicated to providing evaluation and treatment of all spinal disorders affecting the cervical, thoracic and lumbar spine.

Our team of physicians, including physiatrists, nurse practitioners, physical therapists, psychologists, nurses and medical assistants are specially trained to help you through the highest quality of care for conditions affecting the adult and pediatric spine.

As an academic medical center, our physicians are engaged in ongoing clinical research to advance the surgical and nonsurgical methods of diagnosis and management of patients with spine problems.

UMass Memorial Health Care is the largest not-for-profit health care system in Central Massachusetts with 1,500 physicians and more than 12,000 employees. Our comprehensive network of care includes teaching hospitals, affiliated community hospitals, outpatient clinics, community-based physician practices, long-term care facilities, and home health, hospice, rehabilitation and mental health services. UMass Memorial is dedicated to promoting health and wellness in the community, and is proud to be the clinical partner of the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Contributions and memorial gifts to UMass Memorial Health Care are deeply appreciated. For information, call the UMass Memorial Foundation at 508-856-5520 or e-mail to [giving@umassmed.edu](mailto:giving@umassmed.edu).



**UMassMemorial**

[www.umassmemorial.org](http://www.umassmemorial.org)

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## Managing Back Pain



**UMassMemorial**

# Who Gets Back Pain?

## **Risk Factors for Back Pain**

- Aging**  
Discs begin to degenerate by age 30. The discs begin to lose moisture and shrink putting more stress on the joints which can become arthritic causing back pain.
- Sedentary lifestyle**  
Lack of exercise increases your risk for back pain because:
  - Muscle inflexibility restricts the back's ability to bend and rotate
  - Weak back muscles increase load on the spine and the risk of disc compression
  - Weak stomach muscles increase strain on the back and cause the pelvis to tilt abnormally
- Poor posture**  
Spending long periods in one position such as working at a computer or slouching in front of TV is not healthy for your back.
- Obesity**  
Increased weight puts pressure on the vertebrae and discs. A large belly pulls the spine forward and out of alignment, increasing the risk of back strain.
- Genetic factors**  
Some individuals are genetically susceptible, usually from inheriting structural abnormalities.
- Work that is stressful to the back**  
This includes activities such as lifting, forceful movements, bending and twisting into awkward positions, repetitive movements, and vibration (as occurs with long-distance truck driving).
- Improper body mechanics during sporting activities**  
For example, a jerky golf swing or incorrect use of exercise equipment can put your back at risk. Cyclists often experience low back pain, which is often resolved

by adjusting the angle of the bicycle seat. Some research suggests that high-impact exercise such as rugby or aerobics may increase the risk for degenerative disc disease.

- Pregnancy**  
The shifting of abdominal organs and loosening of ligaments in the pelvic area prior to delivery can make women prone to back pain.
- Smoking**  
Smoking decreases blood circulation to the tissues of the back.
- Lifestyle factors**  
Stressful work or home situations, financial concerns with loss of work, stressful legal issues and depression all may contribute negatively to pain and the ability to cope with back problems.

## **Tips for a Healthy Back**

- **Standing**  
Keeping one foot forward of the other with knees slightly bent, takes the pressure off your low back.
- **Sitting**  
Sit with your knees slightly higher than your hips to provide good low back support.
- **Reaching**  
Stand on a stool to reach things that are above shoulder level.
- **Moving Heavy Items**  
Pushing is easier on your back than pulling. Use your arms and legs to start the push. If you must lift a heavy item, get someone to help.
- **Lifting**  
Kneel down on one knee with the other foot flat on the floor, as near as possible to the item you are lifting. Lift with your legs, not your back, keeping the object close to your body at all times.

- **Carrying**  
Two small objects, one in either hand, may be easier to handle than one large one. If you must carry one large object, keep it close to your body.
- **Sleeping**  
Lying on your back puts pressure on your back. Pillows under your knees can decrease the pressure in half. Lying on your side with a pillow between your knees also reduces the pressure.
- **Weight Control**  
Being overweight puts a strain on your back. Keep within 10 pounds of your ideal weight for a healthier back.
- **Quit Smoking**  
Smokers are more prone to back pain because nicotine restricts the flow of blood to the discs that cushion your vertebrae and the muscles that support your back.

## **Treatments**

Treatment of back pain almost always includes some type of physical therapy and a general fitness plan. Other treatments may include medications such as steroid injections and anti-inflammatory drugs or possibly surgery. If you have back pain that is not getting better, ask your doctor about your treatment options.

## **Appointments**

The UMass Memorial Spine Center offers patients prompt, convenient appointments through a centralized scheduling service. To schedule an appointment, call 508-334-1886.

The Spine Center is located on the Memorial Campus (119 Belmont Street, Worcester) of UMass Memorial Medical Center.