

## Low Back Pain

Pain in the lower back is usually caused by muscle strain. Onset of pain may be immediate or occur some hours after exertion or an injury or appear spontaneously. It can be accompanied by sciatica (pain that radiates from the back to the buttock and down into the leg). The symptoms may get into a cycle, starting with a muscle spasm, the spasm causes pain and the pain results in further spasms.

### Causes

- Exertion or lifting
- Severe blow or fall
- Back disorders
- Infections
- Ruptured lumbar disc
- Nerve dysfunction
- Osteoporosis
- Tumors
- Congenital problem
- Often there is no obvious cause

### Prevention

- Exercises that strengthen the lower back
- Learn how to lift heavy objects
- Sit properly
- Back support in bed
- Lumbar pillow or roll for car seat & chairs
- Lose weight if obese
- Choose proper foot wear
- Wear special back support devices

### Treatment

- Diagnostic tests may include lab blood studies to determine if there is an underlying disorder. X rays of the spine, CT or MRI scan
- Bed rest for the first 24 hours. Additional bed rest will be determined by the severity of the problem. Recent medical studies indicate that staying more active is better for prolonged disorders than bed rest.
- Use a firm mattress
- Ice pack or cold massage or heat applied to the affected area with heating pad or hot water bottle
- Physical therapy
- Massage may help

- Wear a special back support device
- Other options are available depending on the degree of injury, such as surgery, electrical nerve stimulation, acupuncture, special shoes, etc.
- Stress reduction techniques, if needed
- Try to continue with daily work or school schedules to the extent possible. Use care in resuming activities.
- Avoid strenuous activity for 6 weeks
- After healing, an exercise program will help prevent re-injury.
- Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications such as Ibuprofen or naproxen as directed may decrease discomfort

**Santa Barbara City College  
Student Health Services  
721 Cliff Drive, Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
SS-170 ♦ 956-0581 ext. 2298  
[www.sbccc.edu/healthservices](http://www.sbccc.edu/healthservices)**