

Back Pain

When to Get Help

Back pain is a common ailment that affects a growing number of Americans on a yearly basis. The vast majority of symptoms will improve over time and not require any type of medical intervention. We will discuss when back pain needs to be evaluated by a health care professional.



Dr. Nitin Khanna

Most injuries to the back and neck would be considered strains or sprains. As a general rule, when an acute strain or sprain occurs, an inflammatory process has been initiated. The goal should be to decrease the inflammation. Ice and over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medication are best utilized to decrease the inflammation.

In the old days, bed rest was prescribed to treat these conditions. Our current understanding is that bed rest leads to rapid deconditioning and weakens the spinal muscles. We recommend gentle stretches and continued light activity during the healing phase. Narcotic pain medication is a poor idea in acute injuries, as there is no anti-inflammatory component in these medications and the patient has the risk of developing a dependence.

Patients with a long history of back pain may be suffering from degenerative conditions of the spine such as arthritis and degenerative disc disease. The mainstay of treatments for these patients is routine aerobic exercise such as walking or swimming along with a stretching program.

When symptoms are severe and are associated with radiation of pain in the arms or legs and/or if weakness is present in the arms or legs, I recommend an evaluation from a spine specialist. Often times this is a sign of injury to a disc which may be compressing a nerve. In these situations, an expeditious evaluation can significantly improve the clinical results.

There is an increasing body of evidence supporting minimally invasive spine surgery leading to decreased recovery times for patients. These advanced techniques are based on decreasing the muscle dissection and blood loss associated with open procedures. Spine surgical procedures can now be done on an outpatient basis with little down time for the patient.

Dr. Nitin Khanna is an award-winning surgeon who specializes in minimally invasive orthopedic spine surgery at Orthopaedic Specialists of Northwest Indiana (730 45th Ave, Munster). Khanna's research has been published in multiple medical journals, and he is the spokesperson for the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgery.