What Causes Lower Back Pain and How Do You Prevent It?

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What Causes Lower Back Pain?

It’s well-known that the majority of people nowadays will experience back pain at some point in their life. We hear a lot about symptoms and treatment, but what causes lower back pain in the first place? Well, that’s where it becomes a little more complicated.

Lower back pain is most often caused by a pulled muscle or ligament. This injury can occur from lifting a heavy object, a sports injury, or poor posture. It most commonly develops slowly over time due to repetitive movements that cause strain on the spine.

While strains may not sound serious, they can cause intense acute pain and eventually worsen and develop into a long-lasting chronic pain that will affect your quality of life.

Below you will find more information about what causes lower back pain and steps to prevent lower back pain from arising.

Muscle/Ligament Sprains and Strains (Acute Back Pain)

A lower back sprain or strain in a muscle or ligament can happen suddenly from intense movements, or can slowly develop over time from repetitive movements and poor posture that causes muscular imbalances in the body.

A lower back strain can be caused by damage to either muscles or ligaments in the lower back:

- A muscle strain occurs when the muscle is stretched too far and tears, which damages the muscle itself
- A ligament sprain occurs when the ligament over-stretches and tears, which damages the ligaments that connect the bones together

However, it does not necessarily matter whether the muscle or ligament is damaged. The symptoms and treatments will be the same in both cases.

Common Causes of Sprain and Strains (Acute Back Pain)

While sprains and strains themselves don’t typically cause any long-lasting pain, the acute pain can be severe and can develop into chronic pain.

The most common causes of lower back pain sprains and strains are listed below:

- Lifting a heavy object with poor form
- Twisting the spine while lifting

- Sudden movements that place excessive stress on the lower back (such as a fall)
- Poor posture for extended periods of time
- Sports injuries, mainly in sports that involve lots of twisting movements or forces of impact (football for example)

Causes of Chronic Back Pain

Unfortunately, back pain can develop into a chronic condition which is when the pain has lasted for more than three months and exceeds the body's natural healing process. In most cases, chronic lower back pain involves a disc problem, a joint problem, or an irritated nerve root.

Although most of the causes of chronic back pain are due to diseases, genetics, and injuries (such as car accidents), it is common for poor habits that caused acute back pain to develop into chronic back pain over time if not corrected.

The most common causes of chronic lower back pain are listed below.

Herniated Disc

- This occurs when the jelly-like center of a lumbar disc breaks through the tough outer layer and irritates a nearby nerve root, thus causing intense back pain in the back until it is corrected.
- Herniated discs can result simply from the wear and tear on the spine from our daily movements and poor habits, or are commonly caused by an injury such as a car accident

Degenerative Disc Disease

- As we age over time, our discs lose hydration and wear down. As the disc loses hydration, it cannot absorb forces as well and can eventually develop tears and cause pain or weakening that can lead to a herniation.

Deformity

- Repetitive movements and poor posture can lead to these deformities which can then result in chronic back pain if not corrected

Compression Fracture

- This type of fracture is most common due to weak bones (from osteoporosis) and is more common in the elderly.
- It can be caused by falls or excessive loads that cause compression on the spine

Trauma

- Lower back pain that develops after accidents are often caused by fractures or dislocations of the spine
- These should be medically evaluated immediately after the accident, as it can worsen over time if untreated

Although there are several other possible culprits of chronic back pain, these are the most common.

If you have been experiencing chronic back pain and have not been examined, then you need to see a medical professional to find the optimal treatment which will depend on obtaining a correct clinical diagnosis.

However, if you aren't experiencing back pain but are thinking about the future, or are currently experiencing acute back pain, then read below for some preventative tips to help keep your back feeling pain-free.

How to Prevent Lower Back Pain from Arising

In many cases, back pain is fully preventable and is simply a result of poor work habits or posture which will strain the back over time.

For example, one of the most common indirect causes of lower back pain is poor posture. Sitting or standing with poor posture for extended periods of time causes excessive stress on the spinal discs which overtime can lead to back pain.

Thus, it's important that you are constantly aware of your posture throughout the day as this can help prevent back pain from arising in the future.

Here are some tips you can use to maintain proper sitting posture:

- Avoid slouching or leaning forward
- Align your back with the backrest of your chair
- Your knees should be even with the hips or slightly higher
- Both feet should be flat on the floor
- Tuck your chin in and ensure that your head is not protruding forward
- Take frequent walk breaks every 30 minutes or perform stretches for back pain

How to Lift Heavy Objects with Proper Posture

Another prevalent cause of acute back pain is lifting heavy objects with poor form. This causes high amounts of stress on the spine and can lead to chronic back pain overtime if done repetitively.

Use the tips below to ensure you are lifting with proper form:

- Keep a wide base of support; your feet should be **shoulder-width apart**
- Squat down by **bending at the hips and knees** without bending in your back
- Keep your **back straight, chest out, and shoulders back** as you lift the object
- **Slowly lift by straightening your hips and knees**
- **Do not twist your back** as you lift
- Hold the load **as close to your body as possible** and level with your belly button as this will decrease the stress on your spine

In summary, what causes of lower back pain can be from an injury, muscle strain or sprains, and the different types of chronic back pain.

Many of these lower back pains are preventable and start with you being aware of your posture while sitting, standing, or lifting objects. The goal is to minimize the daily amount of stress on your spine, as this will ensure its longevity and reduce the likelihood of future injury.

Use the tips described in this article, and you will be taking a step in the right direction!