

Back Pain Facts & Statistics

Although chiropractors care for more than just back pain, many patients visit chiropractors looking for relief from this pervasive condition. In fact, 31 million Americans experience low-back pain at any given time.¹

A few interesting facts about back pain:

One-half of all working Americans admit to having back pain symptoms each year.² Back pain is one of the most common reasons for missed work. In fact, back pain is the second most common reason for visits to the doctor's office, outnumbered only by upper-respiratory infections. Most cases of back pain are mechanical or non-organic—meaning they are not caused by serious conditions, such as inflammatory **arthritis**, infection, fracture or cancer. Americans spend at least \$50 billion each year on back pain—and that's just for the more easily identified costs.³ Experts estimate that as many as 80% of the population will experience a back problem at some time in our lives.⁴

What Causes Back Pain?

The back is a complicated structure of bones, joints, ligaments and muscles. You can sprain ligaments, strain muscles, rupture disks, and irritate joints, all of which can lead to back pain. While **sports injuries** or accidents can cause back pain, sometimes the simplest of movements—for example, picking up a pencil from the floor— can have painful results. In addition, **arthritis**, poor posture, obesity, and psychological stress can cause or complicate back pain. Back pain can also directly result from disease of the internal organs, such as kidney stones, kidney infections, blood clots, or **bone loss**.

Manipulation as a Treatment for Back Problems

Used primarily by Doctors of Chiropractic (DCs) for the last century, manipulation has been largely ignored by most others in the health care community until recently. Now, with today's growing emphasis on **treatment and cost effectiveness**, manipulation is receiving more widespread attention.

Chiropractic spinal manipulation is a safe and effective spine **pain treatment**. It reduces pain, decreases medication, rapidly advances physical therapy, and requires very few passive forms of treatment, such as bed rest.⁵

In fact, after an extensive study of all currently available care for low back problems, the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research—a federal government research organization—recommended that low back pain sufferers choose the most conservative care first. And it recommended **spinal manipulation** as the only safe and effective, drugless form of initial professional treatment for acute low back problems in adults.⁶

The American Chiropractic Association (ACA) urges you to make an informed choice about your back care. To learn more about how chiropractic manipulation may help you, contact a Doctor of Chiropractic in your area. Search our online database of ACA members to **find a doctor of chiropractic** near you.

Tips to Prevent Back Pain

Maintain a healthy diet and weight.

Remain active—under the supervision of your doctor of chiropractic.
Avoid prolonged inactivity or bed rest.
Warm up or stretch before **exercising** or other physical activities, such as **gardening**.
Maintain proper posture.
Wear comfortable, **low-heeled shoes**.
Sleep on a **mattress** of medium firmness to minimize any curve in your spine.
Lift with your knees, keep the object close to your body, and do not twist when lifting.
Quit smoking. Smoking impairs blood flow, resulting in oxygen and nutrient deprivation to spinal tissues.
Work with your doctor of chiropractic to ensure that your **computer workstation** is **ergonomically** correct.

References:

1. Jensen M, Brant-Zawadzki M, Obuchowski N, et al. Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Lumbar Spine in People Without Back Pain. *N Engl J Med* 1994; 331: 69-116.
2. Vallfors B. Acute, Subacute and Chronic Low Back Pain: Clinical Symptoms, Absenteeism and Working Environment. *Scan J Rehab Med Suppl* 1985; 11: 1-98.
3. This total represents only the more readily identifiable costs for medical care, workers compensation payments and time lost from work. It does not include costs associated with lost personal income due to acquired physical limitation resulting from a back problem and lost employer productivity due to employee medical absence. In Project Briefs: Back Pain Patient Outcomes Assessment Team (BOAT). In MEDTEP Update, Vol. 1 Issue 1, Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, Rockville, MD, Summer 1994.
4. In Vallfors B, previously cited.
5. Time to recognize value of chiropractic care? Science and patient satisfaction surveys cite usefulness of spinal manipulation. *Orthopedics Today* 2003 Feb; 23(2):14-15.
6. Bigos S, Bowyer O, Braen G, et al. Acute Low Back Problems in Adults. Clinical Practice Guideline No.14. AHCPR Publication No. 95-0642. Rockville, MD: Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, December, 1994.