



Low Back Pain: Types, Causes and Impact on Quality of Life

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DESCRIPTION

Low Back Pain (LBP) is one of the most common medical conditions worldwide, affecting millions of people across all age groups. It is a leading cause of disability, reduced work productivity and diminished quality of life. The complexity of low back pain is located in its varied causes, which can range from muscle strain to more serious underlying conditions such as degenerative disc disease or spinal stenosis.

Classification of low back pain

Low back pain refers to discomfort in the lumbar region, which is the area of the spine between the ribcage and pelvis. It can be categorized into three types based on its duration.

Acute low back pain: Lasts for less than six weeks. This type of pain is frequently associated with an injury or strain and usually resolves on its own or with minimal treatment.

Sub-acute low back pain: Lasts between six weeks and three months. While less prevalent than acute low back pain, this type can require more extensive therapy to prevent it from becoming chronic.

Chronic low back pain: Persists for more than three months. Chronic low back pain is frequently associated with degenerative conditions or prolonged stress on the spine and it can be more difficult to treat.

Low back pain can also be classified based on its origin

Mechanical pain: This is the most common form and occurs due to difficulties with the spine, muscles, ligaments or tendons. It includes conditions including muscle strain, herniated discs or osteoarthritis.

Neuropathic pain: This type of pain occurs when there is nerve damage or compression, such as with sciatica, where a herniated disc presses on a nerve root and causing sharp, shooting pain down the leg.

Referred pain: pain that develops in a particular region of the body but it occurs in another person such as discomfort from a kidney infection in the lower back.

Causes of low back pain

The causes of low back pain are numerous and they can be classified into several categories.

Muscle strain and ligament sprain is the most common cause of low back pain is muscle strain or ligament sprain, frequently caused by lifting heavy objects improperly, sudden movements or overuse during physical activities. Muscle strain can cause localized pain that is sometimes acute and increases with movement. Herniated or bulging discs act as shock absorbers between the vertebrae in the spine. When one of these discs becomes damaged or herniated, its inner gel including substance can push out and press on nearby nerves, leading to pain. A herniated disc frequently causes pain that radiates down the legs (sciatica) and can also cause numbness or weakness in the lower extremities.

Degenerative disc disease in the spine naturally loses moisture and flexibility, which can lead to disc degeneration. This condition can cause chronic low back pain, as the degenerated discs may no longer provide adequate cushioning for the vertebrae, leading to pain from increased pressure on the joints or nerves. Spinal stenosis occurs when the spinal canal narrows, compressing the spinal cord or nerves. This condition is more common in older adults and frequently results in pain, numbness and weakness in the legs, especially when walking or standing for long periods.

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative joint disease that can affect the spine. As the cartilage between the vertebrae wears down over time, it can lead to pain, stiffness and inflammation in the lower back. Osteoarthritis-related back pain symptoms usually increase with activity and improve with relaxation. Other medical conditions, such as fractures, infections, tumors or conditions including fibromyalgia, can also contribute to low back pain. In rare cases, low back pain may be a symptom of a more serious underlying issue, such as an aortic aneurysm or cancer.

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