

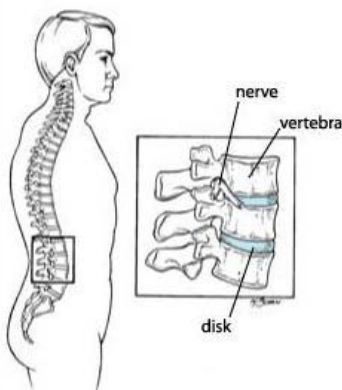
# BACK PAIN

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**B**ack pain is caused by a number of different factors, but if you have pain, the cause probably fits into one of the following 3 categories:

- Disc herniation (commonly known as ‘slipped disc’)
- Disc degeneration
- Sciatic pain

In between each bone in your back (or vertebrae) you have a disk which is made of very thick fibrous tissue that surrounds a gel core. You may have symptoms when that gel core is pushed out of place (herniation) and presses on a sensitive structure like a nerve. A disc can herniate for a number of reasons. Sometimes it is caused by doing a lot of heavy physical labor, especially in a forward flexed position with twisting. Sometimes as the disc ages and loses its elasticity the gel material might be more likely to herniate out of place. A disc can be painful right at the place of herniation, or can cause pain to travel down a nerve in the leg.

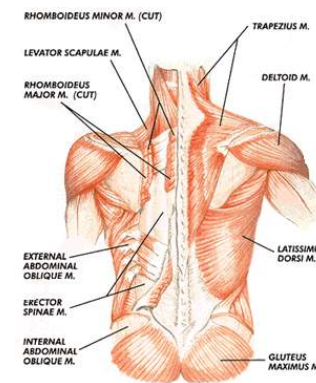


Degenerative disc disease is a condition in which a painful disc causes low back pain. The condition generally starts with an injury to the disc. The injury weakens the disc and stops it from being able to hold its segment together as it used to. This very small amount of extra motion as well as the inflammation that occurs causes the low back pain. Unfortunately the disc is not able to heal itself very well because it has a poor blood supply, so there is potential for the pain from degenerative disc disease progresses to being severe but the pain will tend to fluctuate and at times may worsen temporarily.

Disc degeneration is part of the natural process of aging and does not necessarily lead to low back pain. In fact, the incidence of low back pain actually goes down as we age, despite the fact that our discs are degenerating.

Sciatic nerve pain, or sciatica, is pain that travels down the large sciatic nerve that runs from the lower back down the back of the leg. Some people have pain all the way down the leg to the foot or toes. Usually the pain is only on one side. Sciatica is usually caused by pressure on the sciatic nerve from a herniated disc in the low back. It can also be caused by degeneration in the disc and spine. The pain from sciatica can range from severe and debilitating to infrequent and mostly just irritating. Even when sciatica is very painful, it is rare to have permanent nerve damage. Most sciatica pain is caused by temporary inflammation and will get better

within two weeks to a few months with proper treatment by your physiotherapist.



## TREATMENT

**W**hen back pain is treated by the physiotherapist, he or she will do a variety of things to help you get better, including the following:

- Teach you exercises to increase your muscle strength or ‘core stability’, and to stretch out tight muscles, like your hamstrings (back of the thigh)
- Give you advice on making changes to your normal activities to prevent re-injuring or further irritation your back
- Advise you on an overall exercise program to make you more fit and strong in order to help you avoid injuring your back again
- Treatment to help loosen tight joints and muscles and ease your symptoms.