

## Oh My Aching Back! *By Jessica Lucente, PA-C*

**H**ave you ever suffered from back pain? If so then you're not alone. Back pain is one of the most common complaints that prompt someone to call their doctor's office. Up to 84% of adults experience back pain some time in their lives.

Since this is such a common problem, how do you know when to seek medical attention and when to take care of it at home? If pain has occurred after an injury or you experience a sudden onset, you may want to have an evaluation by your physician. Other symptoms that should prompt a call to the doctor include fever, nausea, difficulty urinating, blood in your urine, unexplained weight loss, night sweats, numbness/tingling in your legs or sudden onset of urinary incontinence. Any weakness, numbness or tingling into one of your legs is something that needs to be further evaluated by your doctor.

If your back pain is more intermittent or chronic in nature, it doesn't mean

you're stuck with it. Your doctor needs to evaluate your range of motion, reflexes and the strength of your muscles to make sure everything is in working order. If everything checks out and pain has lasted more than a month, your provider may order x-rays. This will allow for visualization of any normal wear and tear changes that can occur in the spine. CT Scan or MRI are reserved for patients with pain lasting longer than 12 weeks or those with neurologic findings on physical exam.

What to do with all this information? If nothing requires further investigation, your doctor may recommend heat/ice, an anti-inflammatory (depending on your medical history) and refer you for physical therapy. Some people also get good relief from topical pain creams or patches that contain salicylate, menthol or capsaicin. Always ask your doctor before starting a regime with a chiropractor for back pain. It is important to remember that staying as active as possible will

actually help back pain improve faster than bed rest.

Physical therapy programs can teach good body mechanics, help you learn how to stretch those tight muscles and strengthen your core muscles to keep your back pain from flaring up again in the future. If you don't experience improvement in your back pain after a month of treatment, you should be re-evaluated by your physician.

Things that you can do to avoid back pain:

- Maintain a healthy body weight - excess abdominal weight can put more stress on your back.
- Stretch and do weight bearing exercise regularly to keep muscles in shape and bones strong.
- If you have a physical job, make sure you are using good body mechanics with any lifting.

### Keeping You Healthy

**T**hunderbird Internal Medicine offers regular Hemorrhoid Clinics led by colon-rectal specialists Ariel Forstner-Barthell, MD and Elizabeth McConnell, MD. Check the Hemorrhoid Clinic section on the Services page at [www.thunderbirdim.com](http://www.thunderbirdim.com) for the clinic schedule. An appointment is required so be sure to schedule today.



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