

CRACKING THE CODE ON LOWER BACK PAIN:

When is it Time to Call the Doctor?

Lower back pain can lead to impaired physical functioning, reduced quality of life and contributes to substantial morbidity and mortality each year. According to a CDC report, 39% of American adults had back pain during any given three-month period. The report highlighted that “minor discomfort, musculoskeletal impairment, diminished quality of life and escalating health care costs” are experienced when suffering from lower back pain. Having this kind of pain not only costs us it can also impact our work, family and other relationships.

Timely intervention can make a significant difference in managing and treating lower back pain so pay attention and track your symptoms. This could include writing them down, noting them in a habit tracker app on your phone or mentioning them to an accountability partner. Do whatever works best for you. The goal is to establish a baseline for tracking any patterns that will alert you when something is wrong. Knowing what to pay attention to with your body, when to call in a doctor and then working together with your doctor to translate your needs into a treatment plan can be challenging to navigate while still in pain. Here are some starter tips:

- **Persistent Pain** – any lasting more than a few weeks should be evaluated by a healthcare provider
- **Severe Pain** – intense or sudden pain may indicate a more serious underlying issue
- **Accompanying Symptoms** – symptoms like fever, numbness, or weakness warrant immediate medical attention

Once you have identified that now is the right time for you to seek out medical support, working with your physician to select the right treatment plan is a personalized process that requires careful consideration. Things to keep in mind:

- **Assessment and Diagnosis** – any habit tracking and testing will help to align you with proper treatment
- **Consultation with Specialists** – hearing from others with experience in treating lower back pain can give you choice of the best options and allow you a space to ask clarifying questions
- **Evaluate Risks and Benefits** – review any potential outcomes, recovery times and costs for the treatment plan you design with your doctor and ask for any alternatives where needed



Continued



**Exciting News!
Cook County's
Annual Benefits
Enrollment will
take place
Oct. 16-31, 2023!**

It's your opportunity to:

- Update your health benefit plan enrollments
- Add or remove dependents
- Enroll in a health and/or dependent day care flexible spending account (FSA)
- Enroll in a voluntary benefit plan

Be on the lookout for more information.

New Advance to a Common Pain – the Lower Back

Your path to a pain-free life begins with understanding and becoming educated on the latest advances in lower back health. As mentioned previously, back pain is a national phenomenon that is influenced by and impacts multiple factors, including biological, psychological and social factors. The journey to recovery and relief is often multifaceted, requiring a blend of medical innovation, personal insight and professional care. As medicine advances with influence from technology, evidence is available that some treatments provide a renewed quality of life without persistent pain:

Telemedicine

Post-COVID, virtual consultations continue to remove barriers and wait time for doctors. They provide access to specialized care regardless of geographical limitations. This technology ensures continuity of care and personalized treatment plans. This bridges the gap between patients and healthcare providers. If you're a member of Cook County's medical plan through BCBSIL, your health care providers may offer telemedicine and telehealth services. Ask if this medical care is right for you.

Stem Cell Therapy

Utilizing the body's natural regenerative capabilities, stem cell therapy holds promise in treating degenerative disc disease. By injecting stem cells into impacted areas, there is potential for the body to repair and rejuvenate damaged tissue. Scientists are learning how to use these cells to heal the back. If you're a member of Cook County's medical plan through BCBSIL, your health care provider will need to provide a prior authorization, and or, an approved referral for this service to be in-network coverage under your health plan.

Noninvasive Non-pharmacological Treatment

Whether you're considering a conventional pain management route involving prescription medication, or exploring alternative options, remember the vast number of adults in similar situations increases the likelihood of finding something that will work for you. Per to the CDC, there are alternative treatment options that can be prescribed to any patient choosing to abstain from pain medication:

- Exercise
- Multidisciplinary rehabilitation
- Mindfulness practices
- Self-massages
- Mind-body practices

We will discuss these alternative treatments and therapies in more detail in the final Wellness Wednesday of this month.

If you are enrolled in Cook County's health insurance plan through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois, there are a variety of resources available to learn more about. Whether you are enrolled in the PPO or HMO plan, it is best to either call the BCBSIL Health Advocate number that is listed on your BCBSIL member ID card, to learn if a referral is needed to see a specialist and or to find a provider considered in-network. You can also go digital and login or create an account on Blue Access for MembersSM (BAMSM) at bcbsil.com or text "BCBSIL" to 33633 to download the BCBSIL mobile app, and use Provider Finder[®] tool to search for doctors and hospitals near you that are considered in-network. It's best to choose a provider that's in your plan network so you get the most from your plan coverage.

