

## Guidelines for the Management of Low Back Pain

- ◆ If you smoke, **STOP!** Smoking significantly weakens vertebral disks which leads to back pain and slows the healing process.
- ◆ If you are overweight, **consider losing weight.** Increased weight places more strain on an already painful low back. This can increase pain and prolong the recovery time.
- ◆ Consider **core strengthening** and yoga to reduce strain on your back and improve posture.
- ◆ Strengthening the back with either flexion or extension exercises. Talk to your doctor or physiotherapist about which exercises are good for you.
- ◆ Your family physician may consider **nerve root block, epidural or facet joint injections.**
- ◆ **Chronic Pain Management** if you have chronic low back pain and have been taking narcotics over a long period of time with worsening pain.

For further information the following websites may be helpful:

- ◆ Ministry of Health and Long Term Care of Ontario website for the Ontario Low Back Pain Strategy at <http://www.health.gov.on.ca>
- ◆ <http://www.uptodate.com/contents/low-back-pain-in-adults-beyond-the-basics>

### Return to the Emergency Department if you experience any of the following signs and symptoms:

- ◆ Increase in pain radiating down your leg that cannot be relieved.
- ◆ Loss of the ability to move your leg or foot.
- ◆ Increase in pain so severe that it interferes in your ability to care for yourself.
- ◆ Increase in back pain with a fever, chills, night sweats or weight loss.
- ◆ Loss of control bowel of your bowels and/or bladder.

### Back Surgery

Depending on the cause of your back pain, you **may be a candidate for surgery if:**

- ◆ **Your symptoms indicate an emergency.**
- ◆ Pain interferes with your daily life.
- ◆ Other treatments have not provided relief.
- ◆ The benefits of surgery outweigh your risks for surgery.
- ◆ The cause of your back pain can be helped with surgery.

If you have been referred to the Urgent Neurosurgical Clinic at Windsor Regional Hospital, the referral will be evaluated and you will be contacted by your family doctor. If you do not have a family doctor the clinic will call you directly with your appointment date and time.



## Your Back Pain

You have been evaluated for your Low Back Pain. At this time you have no warning signs, or “Red Flags” to suggest that your back pain would be helped with back surgery. You can expect your back pain to improve within several days up to 12 weeks.

### Red Flag Symptoms might include:

**Neurological:** major muscle weakness, pain that shoots down both legs, bowel or bladder leakage, genital numbness, inability to lift your foot.

**Infection:** fever, urinary tract infection, immune suppression with chemotherapy or long-term steroid use, IV drug use.

**Fracture:** osteoporosis, trauma, or multiple myeloma.

**Tumor:** history of cancer (especially of breast, lung or prostate), weight loss, fever, pain worse at night or when lying down.

**Inflammation:** morning stiffness lasting more than one hour.

**Age:** less than 20 years old or greater than 50 years of age.

## Prevent Low Back Pain

- ◆ Maintain a healthy weight
- ◆ Exercise regularly
- ◆ Lift with your legs, not your back
- ◆ Maintain good posture and use proper body mechanics while at work, change positions often

## Common Causes for Low Back Pain

**80 to 90% of all adults will have back pain during their lifetime.**

**Back pain may be caused by problems with any structure in the back: nerves, muscles, tendons, ligaments, facet joints, discs between the backbones and the back bones themselves.**

**Getting older:** degenerative changes are more common as we age. Many people first experience back pain between the ages of 30 and 40 years.

Poor physical fitness with an inactive lifestyle

Being overweight

Pregnancy

Heavy lifting, overdoing it at the gym, or sports

**Injury:** falls, motor vehicle accidents, etc.

### **Carrying heavy backpack daily**

**Smoking:** disks do not get enough nutrients, are slow to heal, and pain may last longer

**Your job:** If you bend, lift, push, pull, or pull while twisting, or if you sit at a desk all day with poor posture.

**Psychosocial:** Stress at home and/or at work can increase or aggravate symptoms associated with low back pain

**Certain diseases:** Arthritis, Ankylosing Spondylitis, Cancer

## Guidelines for Management of Low Back Pain

- ◆ Pain relievers such as Regular **Acetaminophen** or **Tylenol** or anti-inflammatory medications such as **Ibuprofen**, **Naproxen**, **Advil**, **Motrin**, *may* help relieve your pain. Always take on the advice of your doctor, and read and follow the medications directions. See your family physician if these medications do not help and you feel you need something stronger.
- ◆ **Alternating hot and cold packs**. Do not use longer than 15 to 20 minutes at a time. This may be repeated as needed every hour. Do not apply to bare skin to prevent burns and frostbite.
- ◆ Consider **physiotherapy**, **chiropractic**, **aqua therapy**, **massage therapy** or **acupuncture** as alternative therapies to relieve your back pain
- ◆ See your family physician if your symptoms do not improve within 6 weeks, even though you are doing some of the things listed above.
- ◆ Try to **maintain your daily activity as close to normal as possible**. Normal activity will not harm your back and will help you to recover much sooner.