



## Factsheet

# Back Pain Factsheet

If you're among the 4 out of 5 Australians who experience back pain at some point in their lives, you're not alone.<sup>1</sup> Back pain is the single leading cause of disability globally<sup>2</sup> and can often lead to poorer quality of life, psychological distress or bodily pain. If left untreated, back pain can be life-limiting.<sup>3</sup>

*In 2020-21, an estimated \$3.4 billion was spent on the treatment and management of back problems in Australia.<sup>4</sup>*

## What are back problems?

Back problems are often a musculoskeletal issue, characterised by a variety of complications related to the bones, discs, joints, connective tissue, muscles and nerves of the back that can affect the neck (cervical spine), upper back (thoracic spine) and lower back (lumbar spine) as well as the sacrum and tailbone. Examples of back problems include back or spine pain (such as lower back pain, and sciatica), vertebrae and disc disorders (such as narrowing of the spinal canal, disc degeneration and bulge/herniation), and deforming disorders (such as scoliosis).<sup>5</sup>

For about 8 in 10 Australians who suffer back pain, it's not caused by any particular condition – this is called 'chronic primary low back pain' (also known as non-specific low back pain) which is most common in people aged 35 to 55 years, but it can affect people of all ages.<sup>6</sup>

*Back problems can cause lost social and physical activity, concentration and work capacity and are a significant cause of disability and lost productivity.*

## What is the impact of back pain on sufferers?

Back pain is very common with 1 in 6 Australians reporting having back problems at any one time, that can impact both their physical and mental health.<sup>7</sup> For many, back pain can arise suddenly (acute back pain) but typically improves or resolves within three to six weeks. However, recurrence is common, and some individuals may experience more persistent pain lasting beyond three months.<sup>8</sup>

People experience low back pain in different ways. Most feel pain, stiffness and soreness or find it hard to turn or bend in certain directions. Some say the pain feels like a sharp pain while others report dull aches or spasms. With sciatica, the pain can travel down one or both of the legs. Some people with back pain may feel irritable or short-tempered. Others may worry about whether the pain will control their life, and some experience feelings of helplessness.<sup>9</sup>

## What causes back pain?

Back pain can stem from various factors including muscle or ligament strain caused by heavy physical work; weakness in the back and abdominal muscles; frequent twisting, bending or lifting; poor posture or sitting for long periods (for example, sitting in an office environment); too little physical activity; being overweight and aging.<sup>10</sup>

*Stress can also be a factor along with a range of medical conditions including disc problems, arthritis or osteoporosis.<sup>11</sup>*

## Who are most at risk of back pain?

**Working Australians** who do a lot of physical work are among the highest percentage of Australians at risk of back pain because their work typically involves strenuous activities that strain the spine including lifting and repetitive actions such as bending, squatting or standing for extended periods – all can lead to musculoskeletal injuries causing back pain.

**Older Australians**, particularly those aged over 65 years, are more likely to develop chronic low back pain.<sup>12</sup> Low back pain is the most common health problem among older Australians that can restrict activities and limit overall enjoyment of life.

**Inactive Australians** who don't exercise and spend long hours sitting can develop poor posture, weight gain and musculoskeletal problems which, if left untreated, can lead to chronic back pain.

*International guidelines provide compelling evidence that opioids have a limited role in the management of acute back and neck pain and no role in chronic back pain.<sup>13</sup>*

## Should back pain sufferers use medication alone to treat back pain?

Although pain medications may offer temporary relief from back pain, recent academic studies reveal that opioids, commonly prescribed for this purpose, do not relieve acute low back or neck pain (lasting up to 12 weeks), and may even exacerbate the condition leading to increased pain.<sup>14</sup>

## Is back pain holding you back?

If you or someone you know are among the 4 million Australians who suffer from back pain<sup>15</sup>, consult an ACA chiropractor. Chiropractic healthcare is an effective drug-free and low-risk treatment for musculoskeletal disorders and is one of the most preferred treatment options for back pain sufferers.

*Every week, more than 400,000 chiropractic consultations help everyday Australians maintain their spinal health.*

## Consulting an ACA chiropractor can help!

ACA chiropractors are five-year university educated healthcare professionals who treat a range of musculoskeletal disorders including back pain. They play a vital role in managing the spinal health of Australians by providing holistic healthcare that can treat the cause of back pain and not just the symptoms.

## How do ACA chiropractors treat back pain?

Using specialised non-surgical techniques that avoid the use of drugs and surgery, ACA chiropractors can reduce back pain, improve joint mobility, and reduce stiffness without the use of medication. They can also offer advice on exercise and lifestyle choices that can reduce the risk of spinal health problems and improve your overall health and wellbeing.

## ACA chiropractors are Australia's leaders in chiropractic healthcare.

If you suffer from back problems and you're tired of pain holding you back, chiropractic healthcare can provide effective, drug-free treatment for back pain for all Australians regardless of your age, profession or lifestyle.

*Consult an ACA chiropractor today to take back control of your spinal health and wellbeing by visiting [findachiro.org.au](http://findachiro.org.au)*

Spinal Health Month is the Australian Chiropractors Association's flagship campaign aimed at educating Australians about the importance of maintaining positive spinal health. Look for the ACA Member logo at your local chiropractor or to locate an ACA chiropractor near you, visit

**[consultachiro.org.au](http://consultachiro.org.au)**

For a full list of references, visit [chiro.org.au/references](http://chiro.org.au/references)