

Health tip: Back for health



According to the World Health Organization, low back pain can be experienced at any age and is the single leading cause of disability worldwide.¹

Many back injuries are a result of strain and damage over time, but there are certain motions and risk factors^{2,4} to be aware of:

- Having certain types of cancer or arthritis
- Twisting at the waist while lifting or holding a heavy load
- Lifting or carrying objects with awkward or odd shapes
- Having depression or anxiety
- Using a particular muscle group for long periods of time without relief
- Weak back and abdominal muscles
- Being overweight and inactive

To help avoid back pain consider the following practices:^{1,4}

- Maintain a healthier diet and weight
- Stay active
- Maintain proper posture
- Get quality sleep on a supportive mattress
- Lift with your knees, keep the object close to your body, and do not twist when lifting
- Quit smoking
- Work with your doctor or a chiropractor to ensure that your workstation is ergonomically correct

If you have back pain, there are steps you can take:

- Your first line of support for any health problem should be your primary care physician who can assess your symptoms to determine the best treatment options
- If you don't have a doctor and are looking for one you can find a Premium Designated in-network provider at myuhc.com or through the UnitedHealthcare app
- Call Advocate4Me using the number on your UnitedHealthcare medical ID card to help you make better healthcare decisions regarding your back health, including treatment options and determining the appropriate level of care

Back pain

Chronic back pain is a major cause of work loss, participation restriction, and reduced quality of life around the world.¹

Maintain good posture³

Poor posture can lead to excessive strain on our postural muscles leading them to be more prone to injury and back pain. Poor posture can be caused by stress, obesity, pregnancy, weak postural muscles, abnormally tight muscles, and high-heeled shoes. In addition, a poor work environment, incorrect working posture, and unhealthy sitting and standing habits can also contribute to poor body positioning. The desired position you should seek to achieve is referred to as 'neutral'. Keep these tips in mind when standing or sitting:

- Set the arch of the foot so your weight is evenly distributed
- Align the second and third toe with the knees
- Set your hips in a neutral position with your rib cage tucked down
- Keep a natural spine by avoiding hunching, extending and reaching
- Draw your shoulders down and back
- Center your head on the shoulders
- Tuck your chin in, not up or down
- Look forward

Lift safely⁴

Lifting safely may help you avoid injury. By lifting with your larger, stronger leg muscles instead of the small muscles of your back, you may prevent back injuries and reduce low back pain. Guidelines for lifting objects safely to reduce the chance of back pain, strain or injury include:

- Get close to the load. Get as close to the load as possible to put less force on the low back.
- Maintain your curves. Keep yourself in an upright position while squatting to pick up.
- Tighten your abdomen. Tightening the stomach helps support the spine. Don't hold your breath while tightening the muscles.
- Lift with your legs. Your legs are the strongest muscles in your body—so use them.
- Pivot and don't twist. Turn with your feet, not your back. It isn't built for twisting from side to side.
- Avoid unnecessary twisting
- Keep objects close to body

Sources:

¹ World Health Organization, Low Back Pain. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/low-back-pain>. 2023. Accessed January 2024.

² Mayo Clinic, Back Pain. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/back-pain/symptoms-causes/syc-20369906>. 2023. Accessed January 2024.

³ Stanford University, Postural Awareness. <https://ehs.stanford.edu/subtopic/postural-awareness>. 2024. Accessed January 2024.

⁴ National Institutes of Health, Back Health. <https://ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/HealthAndWellness/Ergonomics/Pages/spine.aspx#lift>. 2024. Accessed January 2024.

This information is for general informational purposes only and is not intended nor should be construed as medical advice. Individuals should consult an appropriate medical professional to determine what may be right for them.