

# Evaluation of Spinal Disorders

## Red Flags

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There are certain signs and symptoms that spine specialists know could represent a potentially serious spine disorder; these signs and symptoms are sometimes referred to as “red flags”. These presentations usually require a comprehensive workup and timely intervention. The list below represents some of the red flags.

Neck or back symptoms associated with one or more of the following presentations:

- Known or previous cancer
- Bowel or bladder dysfunction
- Recent spinal trauma
- Pain unrelieved by rest or any postural modification
- Pain unchanged despite care for 2-4 weeks
- Pain associated with analgia and inability to stay still or inability to move
- Colicky pain or pain associated with abnormal organ (viscera) function
- Fever or known immunosuppressed status
- High risk for fracture (older age, osteoporosis, chronic steroid therapy)
- Numbness or tingling in the trunk and/or one or more extremity when moving the neck (L’Hermite’s Sign)
- Associated fatigue, malaise, and/or weight loss
- Progressive neurological impairment (weakness, sensory loss)

- Severe morning stiffness as the primary complaint
- Symptoms causing a patient to be unable to care for themselves.