

# Spinecare Introduction

## When Should you Report to the Emergency Room for a Spine Problem

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The emergency room is usually not the best place to go with non-traumatic chronic back pain unless it is associated with recent trauma, infection, chest and/or abdominal complaints. The physician in the emergency room is a specialist in emergency medicine and may not have extensive training or experience in the evaluation and treatment of spinal disorders. A trip to the emergency room will often lead to a prescription for an anti-inflammatory or muscle relaxants, and referral to another physician after being released from the emergency room. Back pain concurrent with an infection, fever or as a result of a trauma may appropriately require an emergency room visit. Generally, there are five presentations that indicate a potentially serious back or neck problem. These are:

Loss of control of the bowel or bladder. Any time there is abrupt loss of control of the bowel or bladder; you should go to the emergency room and be evaluated by a physician immediately. One of the most common causes of loss of a control of the bowel or bladder is compression of the lower portion of the spinal cord or nerve roots in the low back leading to a cauda equina syndrome. If this is not treated on a timely basis the condition may result in permanent neurological damage associated with paralysis of the bowel and/or bladder muscles. Loss of bowel or bladder control can also occur with spinal cord compression and /or compromise.

Car accident, fall or other trauma. If you suffer a trauma leading to injury of the spine associated with immediate onset neck pain and/or extremity symptoms, you should be seen at an emergency room for initial evaluation. The evaluation will generally consist of a physical examination and special imaging to assess the degree and consequences of injury.

Abrupt onset extremity weakness. Weakness which extends into the upper extremity and/or leg or foot associated with spinal complaints may represent a serious problem. One of the more common causes is a large disc herniation with nerve compression, although other conditions, including a slow growing tumor can result in extremity weakness. Extremity weakness may also be caused by other types of neurological problems, such as stroke, which needs to be differentiated from a spinal cause. Weakness that extends into an extremity and is progressive may require a visit to the emergency room if you cannot get a touch with a spine specialist during a reasonable period of time.

Excruciating pain. If you are experiencing excruciating back pain that occurs in the evening or on the weekend, then this will require an emergency room visit in order to obtain timely relief.

Back pain with a fever. If you begin experiencing progressive back pain or stiffness with a fever, you should be examined as soon as possible. This may require a visit to the emergency room.

