

# Understanding Back Pain

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Back pain is an extremely common condition that many physicians and researchers consider a normal part of life. It is unusual for a person to get through the life without experiencing at least one major episode of back pain. Studies have shown that back pain affects more than 80% of the population at some point during their lifetime. Back pain is considered second only to the common cold as far as prevalence. Back pain is second only to childbirth as the number one reason for hospitalization. Approximately 50-60% of working population reports at least one episode of back problems each year. The total medical cost of back pain exceeds 50 billion dollars a year and the combined direct and indirect costs are over 100 billion dollars every year in the United States. Spinal disorders are considered the most common cause of physical disability for adults under the age of 45.

At any given time approximately 1-2% of the United States population is temporarily disabled because of back pain. Lower back pain is considered to be the second leading cause of absenteeism at work within the United States. Because of this, back pain results in more loss of productivity than any other single medical disorder. Each year approximately 10% of the population of the United States suffers from at least one episode of back pain. Approximately 2.5 million patients see doctors each year because of low back pain and related complaints. Low back problems remain the most frequent reason for a primary care physician to refer a patient to a specialist such as a neurosurgeon, chiropractic physician, orthopedic surgeon, or other physicians who specialize in physical medicine.

Low back pain remains a leading workers compensation problem. Each year low backache complaints result in approximately 15-20 billion dollars in lost wages. This figure does not include lost wages associated with mid back and neck pain. There are approximately 17 to 20 million people that are on permanent or temporary disability because of low back problems; and as many as 10 million workers suffer physical limitations secondary to low back pain. These figures do not account for the other signs and symptoms associated with back problems such as spinal cord dysfunction and nerve root compromise.