



Health Awareness

Understanding And Coping With Low Back Pain

(NAPSA)—If you're one of the estimated 26 million Americans dealing with frequent or persistent back pain, being able to work, participating in your favorite activities or just taking long walks can be difficult or even impossible.

Many conditions can cause low back pain. As people age, normal wear and tear on the body can result in muscle and bone deterioration. Injuries and trauma can also cause low back pain—even something as simple as lifting a heavy suitcase into the trunk of a car can strain the back. Low back pain can also be a sign of a more serious underlying problem, such as arthritis, osteoporosis or a herniated disc.

That's why it's important to seek medical attention if you're experiencing low back pain—it shouldn't be ignored.

"At some point, almost everyone experiences low back pain. The key is to treat it correctly so that it doesn't become a recurring or chronic problem," said Dr. Perry G. Fine of the American Pain Foundation. "It's important to find a health care provider who can properly assess your condition. Communicating effectively about your pain is critical—where and when does it hurt, what makes it feel better or worse, does it come and go or is it continuous? This information will help your

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health care provider develop an appropriate, individualized treatment plan."

Coping with chronic low back pain can be frustrating, but there are many things—alone or in combination—that your health care provider may suggest that can help:

- **Rest—but only for a short time:** Resting sore muscles can help to ease pain, but remain active. Staying in bed more than one or two days can actually make your pain worse and lead to other problems such as stiff joints and muscle weakness.

- **Medication:** A combination of prescription and over-the-counter medications is often used as part of a treatment plan for low back pain. Your doctor will decide which option (if any) is best based on your medical history, allergies and other medications you may be taking. Everyone's pain is unique and different. Your doctor may switch your medication—or try a combination of medications—to find the right fit for you.

- **Exercise:** Exercise that strengthens back and abdominal muscles can help with recovery

and prevent pain in the future. These core muscles support the spine, and building them up can improve posture, maintain balance and decrease your chance of injury. Your health care provider can provide a list of exercises to fit your needs.

- **Massage therapy:** Massage therapy can be used as part of a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to treatment and may be combined with physical therapy, acupuncture and medication.

Dr. Fine recommends that caregivers and those battling low back pain should learn as much as they can and be actively involved in their own treatment plan.

One of the resources available to learn more is Partners Against Pain®, www.partnersagainstpain.com. The Web site contains a wide variety of information on painful conditions, resources such as pain assessment and measurement tools, and links to pain education and advocacy groups. The Web site can help people with low back pain and their caregivers better understand the condition and improve their ability to talk about pain with their health care provider. People can also find information about low back pain through the American Pain Foundation's Web site, www.painfoundation.org or by calling (888) 615-PAIN (7246).