

Lumbago

Lumbago refers to pain in the lower back or lumbar spine. It is a common condition and can last from one to four weeks with proper medical treatment. When the pain extends down to the feet it is known as sciatica.

What causes it?

The spine is made up of muscles, ligaments, vertebrae and intervertebral discs (spongy shock absorbers between the vertebrae). Injury to any one of these parts can cause pain. The exact cause is often difficult to determine. It occurs sometimes when you bend over, pick something heavy up or if your posture is poor. Sometimes it is related to your job or the amount of physical activity you do or psychological factors that may influence both onset of the pain as well as response to treatment.

How is it diagnosed?

A few questions and a physical examination are usually enough in most cases. If, in addition, you have had fever, lost weight, experienced problems urinating or noted weakness or numbness in your legs, further examination will be necessary.

What do I have to do if I have lumbago?

Your doctor will recommend the best treatment for you. To relieve pain an analgesic is usually the best treatment. Using a hot water bottle or heat pad can also help to reduce the pain.

What kind of activities can you do?

Bed rest for more than 2 or 3 days is not recommended as it can weaken your

muscles and slow down recovery. You have to return to your normal activities as soon as possible.

When you are in pain, you can not exercise. When you are better, exercises appropriate for your age and physical condition will help prevent future episodes of lumbago.

Walking is one of the most commonly recommended exercises and can be done at any age. Swimming can help strengthen your back muscles.

It is very important to maintain proper posture and to avoid poor posture that can cause pain. (see sheet 15).

Lose weight if you need to.

