

Neurosurgery Department



Low Back Pain



National
Neuroscience Institute

SingHealth

Understanding Low Back Pain

Low back pain is a common condition and affects up to 80% of the Singaporean adult population.

It may result due to weakened or overstretched muscles, joints and ligaments.

Other causes include:

- Slipped disc possibly from a sports injury (Figure 1)
- Degenerative diseases affecting the spine
- Fracture (Figure 2)
- Infection (Figure 3)
- Tumour in the spine (Figure 4)



Figure 1
Slipped disc



Figure 2
Spine fracture



Figure 3
Spine infection



Figure 4
Tumour in the spine

Symptoms of Low Back Pain

In severe cases, you may have the following symptoms. Seek medical help early.

- Pain that does not go away despite enough rest
- Severe pain at a spot
- Numbness or weakness in the legs
- Difficulty walking
- Inability to control bladder or bowels
- History of cancer

Diagnosing Low Back Pain

Low back pain can be diagnosed through a clinical examination. Blood tests, x-rays, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Computed Tomography (CT) scans may also be ordered.

Preventing Low Back Pain

Low back pain can be prevented and managed through lifestyle modifications:

- Have a good posture
- Avoid staying in the same position for long periods of time
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Lift properly and avoid bending at the waist
- Change your workspace to reduce strain on the back
- Exercise regularly to strengthen and increase the flexibility of back muscles. e.g. swimming, brisk walking, cycling
- Sleep on a firm mattress

Risk Factors

- Excess body weight increasing strain on the lower back
- Lack of exercise resulting in weak back muscles to support the spine
- Frequent heavy lifting using the wrong posture

Treating Low Back Pain

- Rest and restrict activities until well
- Take pain medications as advised
- Exercise at least twice a day to strengthen the back, stomach and hip muscles
- Hot or cold compression to temporarily relieve pain
- Surgery is only recommended when there is:
 - Inability to control bladder or bowels
 - Numbness and weakness in the lower limbs
 - Pain that does not go away despite treatment

Contact Information

NNI@TTSH

Tan Tock Seng Hospital, NNI Block, Neuroscience Clinic
11 Jalan Tan Tock Seng, Singapore 308433

Main Tel: (65) 6357 7153

Appt. Tel: (65) 6330 6363

Email: appointments@nni.com.sg

Website: www.nni.com.sg



NNI@SGH

Singapore General Hospital, Block 3, Clinic L
Outram Road, Singapore 169608

Main Tel: (65) 6222 3322

Appt. Tel: (65) 6321 4377

Email: appointments@sgh.com.sg

Website: www.nni.com.sg



NNI@CGH

Changi General Hospital

2 Simei Street 3

Singapore 529889

Appt. Tel: (65) 6850 3333

NNI@KKH

KK Women's and

Children's Hospital

100 Bukit Timah Road

Singapore 229899

Appt. Tel: (65) 6294 4050

NNI@KTPH

Khoo Teck Puat Hospital

90 Yishun Central

Singapore 768828

Appt. Tel: (65) 6555 8828

NNI@SKH

Sengkang General Hospital

110 Sengkang East Way

Singapore 544886

Appt. Tel: (65) 6930 6000



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