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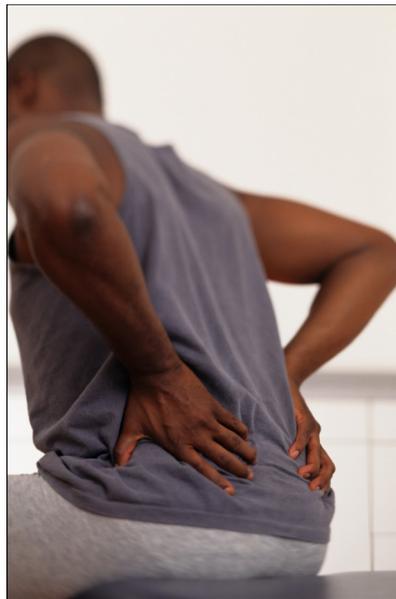
Know the signs and symptoms of back pain

After the common cold, back pain is the problem that most frequently brings people to a doctor's office. Fortunately, most episodes of back pain — about 90 percent — will clear up with little or no treatment in approximately six weeks.

However, back pain that lasts longer than six to eight weeks is usually due to spinal column changes and merits a visit to a physician. To rule out the possibility of a dangerous condition, doctors ask certain routine questions — for example, whether you can relieve the back pain by changing your position and whether you feel back pain when you're not moving.

Some of the best clues to the cause of your back pain will come from your description of the pain. Questions your doctor will ask include:

- **Where is the pain located?** Is it confined to the lower back or does it radiate to the buttocks or legs? (These questions check for sciatica.)
- **How severe is the pain?** For example, is the pain so excruciating that any movement is difficult or impossible? Can you go about your normal daily activities, even though the pain prevents vigorous exercise or activities associated with a lot of bending and twisting, such as gardening or golf? (A good description of pain intensity can help the doctor determine its cause.)
- **When did the pain begin?** Was it related to an activity or an injury? (If the pain follows an injury, it is less likely to be due to a slowly progressing condition, such as spinal stenosis.)
- **What makes your back feel better or worse?** For example, does lying down make it feel better? Does bending forward to tie a shoe increase the pain? (The pattern of pain may indicate whether a nerve is involved, possibly because of a disk herniation.)
- **Have you had a prior episode of back pain?** If so, how was it treated and how effective was the treatment? (The condition may have recurred.)
- **Do you have any other health problems?** (Weight loss and poor appetite, for example, raise the concern that cancer has spread to the vertebrae. In addition, some



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HEMOCARE Management Corporation serves more than 900 clients in 30 North Carolina counties. We have regional offices in Lenoir, Boone, Whiteville, Wilmington, Statesville, Tarboro and Forest City.

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Two key recommendations to prevent falls in older adults

If you want to reduce your risk of falls, take these two measures: Get regular exercise and consider taking vitamin D supplements. That advice comes from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), a federal panel of health experts.

The USPSTF has updated its recommendations to prevent falls in people 65 and older who aren't living in a facility such as an assisted-living residence or a nursing home. The task force reviewed evidence from studies that investigated what works and what doesn't for fall prevention.

What works, says the USPSTF, are taking vitamin D supplements and engaging in exercise or physical therapy. That's because each of these measures strengthens muscles and improves balance — which helps reduce falls.

The USPSTF found that older adults who took vitamin D supplements or engaged in exercise or physical therapy reduced their chances of falling by about 13 to 17 percent. Individuals who were vitamin D deficient or already at increased risk for falling — such as people with a history of falls or mobility problems — benefited most.

The USPSTF didn't specify the

amount of vitamin D needed to reap its benefits, but most studies' participants took 800 IU a day. The Institute of Medicine recommends 600 IU a day for people ages 51 to 70 and 800 IU for those older.

As for activity guidelines, the USPSTF cited the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which suggests the following for older adults:

- At least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, like brisk walking or water aerobics, or 75 minutes a week of vigorous activity like running or swimming laps
- Muscle-strengthening activities, like lifting weights or yoga, twice a week
- Balance training, like tai chi or balance exercises, three or more days a week for people at increased risk of falling

Ask your doctor about your risk factors for falling and if you should increase your activity or take vitamin D supplements.

Source: Johns Hopkins Medical Center

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disorders, such as hyperthyroidism, can cause osteoporosis.)

- **What medications do you take?** (Certain drugs, such as corticosteroids and anticonvulsants, can affect spinal bone mass.)

- **What do you do for a living,** and what kinds of exercise or other activities do you do? In what ways is the pain disabling? (Muscle injury is frequently related to a particular activity.)

Source: Johns Hopkins Medical Center

Happy Birthday

JANUARY

Betty Powell and Tracy Soots, 2; Penny Sturgill, 4; Lillian Jones, 11; Clyde Hallman, 18; Rachel Cook, 20; Rebecca Carroll, 27; Arlene Minton, 30; Barbara Reel, 12; Patricia Cannon, 13; Virginia Lingerfelt, 15; Shirley Smith, 15; Etta McKinney, 31

FEBRUARY

Lynn Blair, 2; Alachia Johnson, 3; Helen Morris, 6; Wilma Howell, 10; Christine Moore, 19; Constance Howell, 24

MARCH

Lori Brown, 1; Chris Wilson, 3; Toni Helms, 12; Helen Magness, 14; Rachel Widener, 17; Agnes Osborne, 18; Albert Chester, 25; Debbie Hyler, 26; Lynn Buckner, 30

APRIL

Mattie Silver, 1; George Mull, 3; Julie Gaither, 10; Mabel McLean, 14; Ruby Mitchell, 17; Wilma Goble, 18; Elizabeth Neal and Ethel Watson, 20; Lottie Fox, 21; Terri Taylor, 27; Dorothy Wills, 28; Joyce Gilmer, 29