

WHAT YOUR SYMPTOMS MEAN

Many back problems can improve on their own or with non-surgical treatment. The key is to understand what various symptoms mean and which symptoms are emergencies and need to be seen immediately by a spine specialist.

PAIN IN THE ARM - When pain radiates into the arm, the problem is serious and should be seen by a spine specialist within 48 hours. Pain that shoots into the arm below the elbow can imply a herniated disc in the neck. This may include weakness, tingling or numbness in the hand. As a rule of thumb, the further down the arm that the pain radiates, the more serious the problem.

LOWER BACK PAIN - Pain exclusively in the lower back can often be a result of muscle strain. While pain spasms can be excruciating, you may not need surgery. The best treatment for this pain is usually rehab and therapy. Cases of lower back pain that persist for months are a different story. This is called "axial low back pain." These cases are more difficult to treat.

LOSS OF BOWEL OR BLADDER CONTROL - This symptom needs to be treated immediately by a spine surgeon within 24 hours. If you experience these symptoms at night or on the weekend, go to the emergency room. If not seen immediately, the person may lose control over their bowel and bladder permanently.



+ **FEVER, DROWSINESS, SEVERE HEADACHE, NAUSEA OR VOMITING, SENSITIVITY TO LIGHT?** Go to the emergency room or make a same-day appointment with a spine surgeon.

NECK PAIN - Pain in the neck can be caused by traumatic injury, like whiplash from a car accident, or more simply from muscle or ligament strain.

PAIN INTO THE LEG - When pain shoots down into the leg, the problem is more serious and should be seen by a spine specialist within 48 hours. Pain that shoots into the leg can be an indication of a herniated disc in the lumbar spine. As a rule of thumb, the further down the leg that the pain radiates, the more serious the condition.

BELOW THE KNEE - When pain radiates below the knee, it is important to see a spine specialist within 48 hours so that the pain does not become permanent.

+ **FOOT DROP** - If pain, weakness or numbness extends into the foot so that you are unable to lift it, see a spine specialist within 24 hours. If not treated immediately, it can lead to permanent weakness in the leg.

Understanding your back or neck pain symptoms

It is estimated that 80% of back and neck pain symptoms will go away on their own over six weeks with some special exercises. However, some problems represent emergency symptoms and need immediate medical attention to prevent neurological damage. Here's some brief information on how to recognize some danger symptoms. Any symptom that does not improve over three days is a signal to seek medical attention. If you have any emergency symptoms, be sure to note that to the spine specialist when calling for an appointment.

Have you experienced any...

- loss of control of bowel or bladder?
- numbness or tingling in an arm or leg?
- difficulty moving an arm or leg?
- SEVERE trauma, fall or car accident?
- Neck pain WITH severe headache, nausea, bright lights bother your eyes?

YES

- Loss of bowel/bladder control is an EMERGENCY symptom. You need to see a spine surgeon or go to an Emergency Room within 24 hours, or the symptom could become permanent.
- Numbness, pain or tingling into a leg or arm, especially when it extends below a knee or elbow, could imply a disc problem, and should be seen by a spine specialist within 2 days.
- Any traumatic fall or car accident could have fractured bones in your spine, or herniated a disc. You should see a spine specialist promptly who may perform X-rays to assess you.
- Neck pain with headache/nausea is an EMERGENCY symptom. See a doctor in 24 hours.

NO

Did the pain come on after lifting, or after aggressive exercise or sports activity?

YES

- Lifting or sports activities can strain muscles, ligaments & tendons, causing painful spasms. Extreme pain can require a spine specialist. Home remedies include anti-inflammatories like Advil/Nuprin, rest, ice and some simple stretching exercises. However, if symptoms don't improve over 3 days, you need to be assessed by a spine specialist.

NO

Is the pain mostly in your low back, AND accompanied by a FEVER, or making you sick?

NO

- Back or neck pain that doesn't radiate pain or numbness into a leg or arm can be caused by a variety of problems, including a strain of the muscles or ligaments in the back or neck.
- Home remedies include anti-inflammatories like aspirin, Advil or Nuprin, rest, ice and some simple back/neck exercises. Don't do any exercise that causes an increase in pain.
- Remember: Those who self diagnose themselves and self treat themselves do so at their own risk. Back and neck pain can arise from a variety of causes and may require a spine specialist to perform diagnostic tests to identify your problem and the best treatment. A spine specialized therapist can also create a home exercise program customized for you.

YES

Pain in the low back, along with a fever, could be a kidney infection. You should see a spine specialist immediately.