

BACK PAIN

MEDICATION FOR LOW BACK PAIN

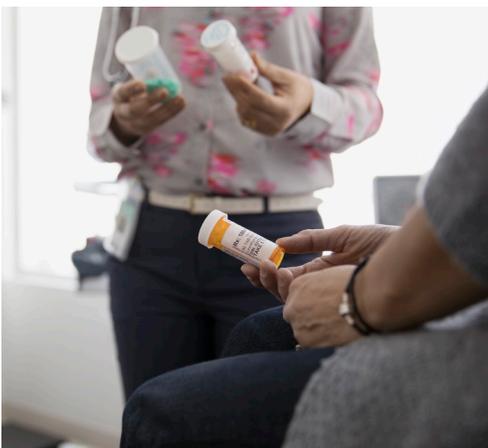
Depending on the cause of lower back pain, medication can provide pain relief, decrease inflammation, prevent muscle spasms, and aid in the recovery process.¹

Important

The decision to take any medication, even when purchased over the counter, must be made carefully under doctor supervision and based on an individual's particular circumstances and medical profile. This also applies to "natural" remedies and supplements. Medication should not be taken without prior diagnostic testing to verify the cause of back pain and individuals must be aware of any side effects, restrictions or incompatibilities before taking any medications and the instructions for use must be followed as indicated.

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Analgesics

Analgesics are also known as pain killers and are therefore solely focused on relieving pain. Analgesics are commonly held to be safer medication choices compared with anti-inflammatory medications or NSAIDs (see below) as they tend to have fewer complications. For pain that is localized in the soft tissues of the back, some individuals may benefit from analgesics in the form of an ointment, cream, or salve that can be rubbed into the skin.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

NSAIDs are a category of medication that includes many different types of drug. Available either over the counter or by prescription only, they combine pain relief with inflammation reduction. A popular example is Ibuprofen. NSAIDs are usually taken orally but may also be available as topical applications. NSAIDs may cause more complications for users, such as digestive problems, than analgesics.¹ For this reason, a careful understanding of the instructions for use and side effects of this medication is advised.

Muscle relaxants

If muscle spasms are an issue, medication known as muscle relaxants may be an option. Contrary to what their name implies, muscle relaxants do not actually work directly on the muscles but rather on the brain and spinal cord.² Sometimes these are prescribed jointly with NSAIDs (see above) under doctor's advice.¹ A common side effect of muscle relaxants is sleepiness or drowsiness and therefore their use during the day or for individuals who drive or operate machinery is not recommended. Moreover, as muscle relaxants may not be compatible with other medications and can be habit-forming, they must be used in close consultation with your doctor.



Antidepressants

Even when an individual does not suffer from depression, low doses of antidepressant medication have proven to be an effective treatment for chronic pain, including low back pain. This is possibly because these drugs are designed to increase the neurotransmitters in the spinal cord that are responsible for reducing pain signals, changing the way an individual perceives pain.^{2,3} Some antidepressants also help to improve sleep and restfulness.² This provides an additional benefit for back pain sufferers, since sleep promotes the body's own healing process.

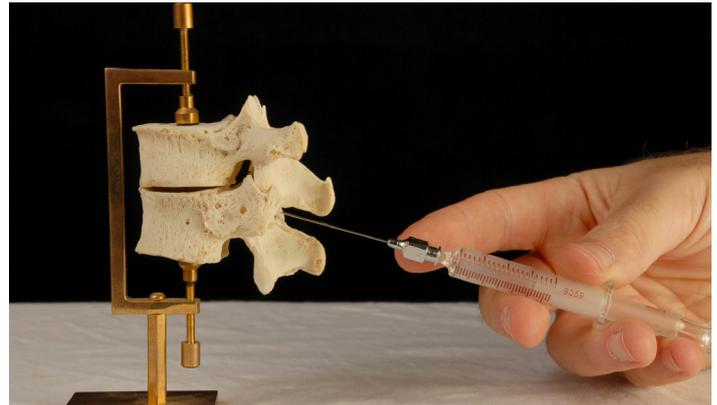
Antidepressants are not for everyone, and many come with important side effects that need to be carefully considered.² Furthermore, antidepressants do not take immediate effect and results may take weeks to be felt. However, antidepressants may be used in conjunction with other pain relief medication for maximum effect, always under doctor supervision.³

Injections

Transforaminal epidural steroid injections (TFESIs), or epidural corticosteroid injections, are generally used when both physical therapy and NSAID medication (see above) have already been attempted. Injections work to reduce inflammation, pain, and stiffness and have proven effective for short-term relief in as many as 80% of cases.^{4,5}

Depending on the type of injection, results be felt within hours or may take several days to take effect. Pain relief normally lasts up to a few months. Injections must be administered by a doctor or health professional, and may be given in

the joints (intra-articular), muscles (intramuscular), spine (epidural) or blood (intravenous).⁴ In general, between one and three injections is required, and injections must be spaced apart by at least six weeks, with a maximum of three per year. Moreover, there is a risk of stroke or spinal cord injury with this treatment, as well as a range



of short and longer term side effects. Injections are not appropriate for certain individuals and medical conditions and some people even require a period of rest after receiving one. If you are considering injections for lower back pain relief, it is important to weigh the benefits against possible complications and to provide your doctor with your complete medical history and any medications you are currently taking.^{4,5}

Questions about your diagnosis?

Unsure which treatment is right for you?

Did you know you have access to a free, independent and confidential decision support service?

Discuss your concerns and have your case reviewed by a specialist in your condition.

The decision is yours. And we're with you all the way.



1. Medications to Treat Back Pain. Arthritis Foundation website. <http://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/where-it-hurts/back-pain/treatment/back-pain-treatment-medication.php>. Accessed September 22, 2017.

2. Medications for back pain. Medline Plus website. <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007486.htm>. Updated September 5, 2017. Accessed September 25, 2017.

3. Antidepressants: Another weapon against chronic pain. Mayo Clinic website <http://www.mayoclinic.org/pain-medications/ART-20045647>. September 13, 2016. Accessed September 22, 2017

4. Steroid injections. NHS Choices website. <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/steroid-injections/Pages/Introduction.aspx>. Reviewed March 23, 2017. Accessed September 25, 2017.

5. Epidural corticosteroid injection. MCG. Ambulatory Healthcare 20th Edition. Updated January 28, 2016. Accessed May 3, 2017.

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