

# BACK PAIN



## SMOKING, ALCOHOL, AND LOW BACK PAIN

### Introduction

Individuals who smoke are nearly three times more likely to develop low back pain than non-smokers.<sup>1</sup> Smoking has been linked to increased joint pain, a slower healing process and an overall increase in sensitivity to pain. Moreover, because smoking results in a decreased flow of blood and nutrients to bones and tissue, it increases the risk of spinal disc degeneration and osteoporosis.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, excessive alcohol intake can interfere with the production of new bone, contribute to bone loss<sup>2</sup> and make it more difficult for the body to absorb calcium<sup>3</sup>, leading to increased fragility and increased risk of fracture.

### Take steps to quit smoking

- Consider your reasons for quitting smoking. Write down the most important reasons on cards or sticky notes. Place them on your fridge, computer screen, wallet, and pack of cigarettes.
- Set a date for quitting smoking. It should be in the near future, but allowing enough time to make a plan, become mentally prepared, and seek support from friends and family.
- Talk to a doctor. Some people stop smoking altogether from Day One. Others prefer to taper off gradually. The same is true for methods such as patches, medication, or alternative therapies: there is no “right” way. Your doctor can advise you of the safest, most reliable options based on your situation.

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- Tell your family, friends and co-workers about your commitment to quit smoking. This will create “positive pressure” to make your ideas a reality.
- Smoke-proof your home and office: throw away ashtrays and lighters, and ensure that there is no tobacco on site.
- Anticipate, avoid, or modify trigger situations, such as having a coffee, finishing a meal, or taking a break at work. Try alternative activities, such as going for a walk or chatting with a non-smoking colleague away from any smokers.
- Make sure that your kitchen, work desk drawer, car glove compartment, and night table are stocked with healthy alternatives to cigarettes, such as sugar-free gum, fruit, or even “mock-cigarettes” such as straws or stir sticks.

## Limit alcohol consumption

- Women and men over 65 years old should have no more than one drink per day. Men under 65 years old should limit their intake to two drinks per day.<sup>4</sup>
- Have at least two alcohol-free days a week.
- Don’t keep alcohol at home.
- If you drink spirits, choose single shots instead of double shots.
- If you drink beer, try a light beer.
- Alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, such as alcohol-free beer, sparkling water, or a low-calorie soft drink or juice.

### What is one drink?<sup>4</sup>

- 12 fl oz (355 ml) of beer
- 5 fl oz (148 ml) of wine
- 1.5 fl oz (44 ml) of spirits (80 proof)



## 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. Why Smoking Will Worsen Your Chronic Pain. Cleveland Clinic website. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/2017/08/why-smoking-will-worsen-your-chronic-pain/> August 23, 2017. Accessed August 28, 2017.

2. Food and Your Bones- Osteoporosis Nutrition Guidelines. National Osteoporosis Foundation website. <https://www.nof.org/patients/treatment/nutrition/> Accessed August 28, 2017

3. Osteoporosis and nutrition: 5 Key Steps. Mayo Clinic website. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/osteoporosis/art-20304601?pg=2> March 10, 2017. Accessed August 28, 2017.

4. Alcohol: If you drink keep it moderate. Mayo Clinic website <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/alcohol/art-20044551> August 30, 2016. Accessed August 28, 2017.

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