



Managing Back Pain

Lower Back Pain Ballarat

It can be a dull or excruciating ache. It may feel like it's burning, stabbing or throbbing. It may stay in one place or radiate up to your shoulder and down your legs. It may be there only when you move or keep you awake at night. It's back pain and it can make your life miserable.

Back pain can be put into two categories: acute which means it's only been going on a short time or chronic which means it's been happening for 4 weeks or longer. Both types can be incapacitating. Acute back pain that does not go away becomes chronic.

Chronic back pain can impact on every aspect of your life. You become tense and stressed because of the pain – and frustrated or irritable. You try to avoid moving in a way that makes it worse which can place strain on other muscles and joints or may cause falls. You may be tired because you can't sleep properly. You may have a reduced appetite because of the pain and don't have much energy. After a while, you may feel depressed or that you will never be pain free again.

In my practice as Chinese medicine practitioner, I seen many people with back pain and have heard all these related problems. There is no doubt that back pain can be devastating for the person suffering it and for their family.

What are some of the causes of back pain?

There are many causes of back pain – these are some of the most common.

Stress – People hold stress in different parts of their body – the lower back is a common area. During times of stress, the muscles in the lower back may become tight and painful. If you're under significant and long periods of stress, this pain may become chronic.

Poor posture – Slouching, standing with your weight on one leg or not bending your knees to lift things can all lead to back pain which may become chronic pain.

Sprains and strains – Most people have experienced this at some stage: you twist or lift something too heavy and suddenly feel a sharp pain in their lower back. The first thing you think is “I shouldn’t have done that”. Often this will quickly disappear but sometimes it lingers or becomes worse.

Prolapsed or herniated disc – Your spine is a pathway for the nerves that link to all part of your body. These nerves are protected by bony vertebrae and between the vertebrae is a softer tissue which acts as a “shock absorber”. This tissue is known as the “disc”. The disc can be damaged in a number of ways, particularly by twisting while lifting something too heavy. When this occurs, disc between the spinal vertebrae may become deformed and touches the nerve leaving the spine causing severe pain. Often the back muscles close by get tight and spasm which can make the pain worse.

Spinal Stenosis – The nerves leave the spine through little holes. If the hole narrows, the nerve becomes pinched or impinged. This can cause severe pain which may radiate down the whole length of the nerve – sciatic nerve pain is a common example of this. In many cases, the muscles close to the nerve, particularly near the spine, also spasm making the nerve impingement worse.

Arthritis – Excessive use or just normal wear and tear on your joints can cause inflammation, pain and stiffness. People with spinal arthritis may also experience weakness or numbness in their legs.

Fibromyalgia – This is a condition where pain is felt though the body, particularly in areas which are used frequently. The pain may be a dull, uncomfortable ache or may be unbearable.

[What can you do for low back pain?](#)

Many different things that can assist in the improvement and reduction of chronic and acute lower back pain.

Heat - If a muscle is cold, it will contract and become tight. If it is cold for a long time, those contractions may cause spasms. Heat not only warms the muscle but encourages the blood vessels to dilate bringing in more nutrients to encourage healing. Warm showers, baths and heat packs are great way to warm muscles.

Stretching - Stretching may reduce pain frequency and intensity. It is important to ensure that the muscles are warm when stretched – stretching a cold muscle may cause damage and make the pain worse. Also, the muscles should only be taken to the point where the stretch can be felt – not to the point where pain is felt.

Strengthening - Often when you experience pain you try not to use the area. This places an extra burden on other muscles. As the pain is managed, it is important to strengthen the area that hasn't been used. Exercises to strengthen muscles that may have been underused for long periods of time may also assist in the management of chronic and acute low back pain.

Relaxation - Stress can make muscles tight which in turn can make the back pain worse. Relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises, meditation or quiet contemplation can all help manage and even reduce pain.

Muscle relaxants - Encouraging the muscles to relax can release tension and stop spasms. Magnesium is one of the most common muscle relaxants and can be very useful if applied as a cream to the sore area. Other creams that may be helpful are heating ones such as Deep Heat or Tiger Balm.

Acupuncture - A review of 32 randomised control trials has shown acupuncture has a positive effect in the treatment of chronic non specific low back pain in comparison to placebo and had a positive effect on function. In a review of 11 randomised control trials acupuncture was found to be superior to NSAIDS in effect when treating acute low back pain symptoms.

[Looking for help in managing your pain?](#)

At Phoenix Centre for Acupuncture and Holistic Health, I use a combination of acupuncture, Chinese medicine, cupping, diet, exercise, relaxation and life style advice to help you manage your pain. Each session is tailored to your specific needs and, where necessary, I work with other health practitioners to ensure you get the best outcome possible.

Contact Phoenix Centre for Acupuncture and Holistic Health to find out more or to make an appointment (Telephone: 0487153507).

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