

# What **You** Should **Know** About **Acute** **Low Back Pain**

## Facts about acute low back pain:

- Low back pain is very common. Most of us will have an episode of low back pain at some point in our lives
- Low back pain is most often caused by back strain and resolves within a few weeks without medical treatment
- Recurrent or repeated episodes of low back pain are quite common
- The best way to prevent recurrences of low back pain is to be physically active

## When should I seek professional help for acute low back pain?

- When it's severe
- When it's getting worse not better
- When you're having trouble controlling your legs or bodily functions (bowel and bladder control)
- When you're over 50 and it's your first episode of low back pain

## Who is qualified to evaluate me?

- Family doctors, chiropractors, physical therapists, and osteopathic physicians are trained to evaluate people with acute low back pain

## Will I need X-Rays, an MRI, or laboratory tests?

- Since most low back pain is caused by muscle or ligament strain, these tests will not reveal anything and therefore are not needed
- Your doctor will order tests only if another cause of low back pain is suspected and can be verified by these tests

## What should I do?

- Keep moving! Staying active helps and most acute low back pain will go away, without treatment, in 4 to 6 weeks.
- If needed, take Acetaminophen or anti-inflammatory medication for the pain.
- See a health care professional if the pain is getting worse instead of better or if new symptoms appear.

## What will help me recover?

- Research has shown that the following actions speed recovery:
  - Remain active
  - Return to your usual activities (bit by bit) including work as soon as you can. You may have to modify your activities to start with if they make your pain worse
  - Supervised exercise may be helpful.
- Most people recover within 4 to 6 weeks without any specific treatment

## Should I take pain medicines?

- Many people do not take any pain medicines for acute low back pain
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) and anti-inflammatory medication called NSAIDs (such as Ibuprofen, Advil or Motrin) can be effective
- Your doctor can prescribe other medicines if your pain is interfering with activity or is severe

## When should I go back to my doctor or health care provider?

- If you aren't improving after 6 weeks
- If your pain is getting worse
- If you have new symptoms

