

**BACK PAIN: HOW TO PREVENT IT,
HOW TO KEEP IT FROM COMING BACK.**
A message for workers

Back pain is the most common type of pain and one of the most frequent reasons for medical consultation. According to expert estimates, 60–80% of the population will experience it over the course of their life.

Back pain is generally classified according to the part of the body affected.

- **Cervical**

When the pain affects the neck

- **Thoracic**

Pain in the upper back

- **Lumbar**

Pain in the lower back (the most common)

- **Sacroiliac or coccygeal**

Pain in the lowest vertebrae of the back, in the region between the hips (sacrum) or pain in the coccyx

It is difficult to realize how much our back is involved in almost every movement – as long as you have back pain, of course. That is when you truly become aware of it.



But why is back pain so widespread?

This is because the risk factors for this condition are very numerous and many of them are very common.

MAIN RISK FACTORS:

- Sedentary lifestyle, obesity
- Smoking
- Genetic factors (there is often a hereditary component)
- Mental health disorders: anxiety, depression, and poor social support
- Type of work: lifting loads frequently, standing for several hours, working indoor for long periods in restricted spaces, repeatedly bending the trunk toward the legs, as it still occurs in many agricultural jobs and in several other sectors.

Most episodes of acute back pain (lumbago) and, less frequently, neck pain (cervicalgia) disappear within a few weeks, but in about one third of patients the pain develops into a chronic condition.

This is why back pain is the leading cause of disability worldwide.

MANUAL HANDLING OF LOADS

Manual handling of loads is still a very widespread work practice involving sectors such as construction, agriculture, fishing, healthcare, logistics, industry, and commerce.

This activity includes lifting, pushing, pulling, or carrying objects by hand and represents one of the main causes of musculoskeletal disorders, particularly affecting the back.

In principle, lifting or carrying loads should not have negative consequences for the human body. On the contrary, our body is designed so that, when it is subjected to loads, its performance capacity improves.

There is an optimal level of physical exercise at which muscles, ligaments, bones, and joints support loads well and adapt to them effectively. This occurs thanks to an increase in muscle mass but also through specific movement patterns one can learn.



However, when the loads to be handled become excessive, problems begin.

At first, the manual handling of excessive loads usually causes only temporary disorders, which completely disappear after a sufficient recovery time.

These temporary disorders are often caused by muscle contractures or overstretching of ligaments. If, however, the maximum tolerable load limits are clearly exceeded, or if a sufficient recovery time is not allowed, degenerative injuries may occur, for example disc and ligament injuries (disc protrusions or herniated discs).

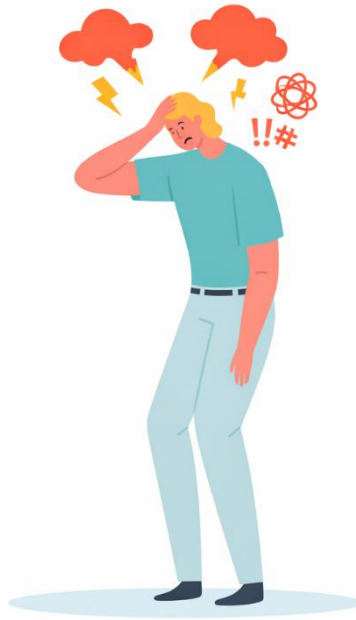
STRESS

Stress is a recognized risk factor for both lower back pain (lumbago) and neck pain (cervicalgia). According to orthopaedic specialists' experience, neck pain is particularly associated with stress.

With regard to work activities, several studies show that high job demands, low job control, work-life imbalance, job insecurity, and hostile work environments are associated with a significant increase in the risk of cervicalgia and lumbago.

The association is bidirectional: stress can trigger or worsen neck and back pain, while chronic cervical or lumbar pain can, in turn, increase stress, creating a vicious circle that perpetuates both conditions.

For this reason, the assessment of work-related stress risk, carried out by employers and required by European and Italian regulations for all workplaces, is also important for the prevention of spinal pain.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- Maintain a regular physical activity: exercise is an important strategy for the primary prevention of back pain. No specific type of exercise is necessary; programs that include aerobic activity, strengthening, flexibility, and coordination are effective.
- Maintain a healthy body weight: excess weight is associated with an increased risk of back pain; weight loss may be beneficial.
- Quit smoking: smoking is a risk factor for both back and neck pain, and quitting it can bring benefits.
- Manage stress and psychological factors, both at work and in all other areas of life: anxiety and depression increase the risk of chronic spinal pain.
- Avoid prolonged use of orthopaedic braces: they are useful only in acute phases, when pain is severe.

- Be careful with loads that must be lifted or carried manually: both at work and outside work, if mechanical aids are not available, it is necessary to ask for help.
 - If back pain does not disappear, there may be an underlying disease: some general diseases can occur with back pain - back or neck pain may be a consequence of medical treatments - medications can also cause these symptoms though very rarely. Therefore, it is important to seek advice from your family doctor or the medical services for people who do not have a primary care physician.
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