

# Get back to life.

A comprehensive guide to back pain and treatment.



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## Is your back acting up? You are not alone.

Eighty to 90 percent of people in the United States will suffer from back pain at some time during their lives. In fact, back pain is the second most common reason people visit their family doctors.



### You don't have to live in pain.

There are often simple lifestyle changes you can make to alleviate back pain so you can get back to life. This guide is designed to help you understand your back pain and give you an overview of treatment options.

Baptist Health offers the most comprehensive spine program in North Florida. Through Lyerly Neurosurgery and Jacksonville Orthopaedic Institute, Baptist Health offers a multidisciplinary approach to the care of patients with disorders affecting the lumbar, thoracic, cervical and craniocervical spine. Our goal is to help each patient restore function and to improve the quality of their lives. Treatment planning supports your individual needs, from diagnosis through treatment, pain management and rehabilitation.

The only ailment more common than back pain is the common cold.



## Why does my back hurt?

The overwhelming majority of back pain stems from overuse of the neck or back, or the gradual changes associated with aging.

In many cases, acute back pain results from a strain or a sprain of the muscle and can spread to other parts of the body. It can be triggered by a sudden movement, or the result of the overstretching of muscles that occurs over time.

The majority of people, however, aren't able to pinpoint one particular incident or movement that started their pain.

Some of the key causes of lower back pain are:

- **A sedentary lifestyle.** Even a job that keeps you sitting or standing in one place for a long period of time could be a factor.
- **Overuse.** Exercise is crucial, but too much weightlifting or playing sports that involve pushing and pulling can lead to injury.
- **Obesity.** The entire body has to work harder and people tend to move from their back instead of using the rest of their body.
- **Smoking.** If you smoke, your body may not be able to get the necessary nutrients to the discs in your back.
- **Incorrect posture.** Slouching for long periods of time puts unnecessary pressure on the lower back.
- **An impact injury.** A forceful collision in an automobile accident or from a fall can lead to back pain — even if the pain is initially tolerable and evolves to the point where it becomes debilitating.

**Once the pain subsides some, stretching exercises can help your back feel better. Exercises where you bend forward can help for back pain that hurts when you stand. For pain that comes from sitting, try bending backwards to stretch the muscles.**

## What can I do to make it feel better?

In many instances of common back pain, rest and over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications, such as ibuprofen, will do the trick.

The next step is using ice packs and applying pressure to the area that is causing pain. Ice can be applied for 20 minutes every two hours, but be sure to place a towel between the ice and your skin. After 48 hours, dry heat from a heating pad can also help soothe the pain.

Physicians recommend slowing down temporarily, but remaining physically active as you gradually return to your normal activity level. While it may seem like bed rest is the only and best option, back pain is NOT something you should take lying down. Physicians recommend no more than a day or two of bed rest at the start of back pain.

If medical treatment is needed, first check with your primary care physician. He or she will ask a series of questions about the pain, family medical history and your typical physical activity level.

Your doctor may recommend pain medication and a regimen of physical therapy to help work through the issue. Physical therapy will often begin in a one-on-one, supervised setting, but you'll also be given instructions on how to do certain stretches and exercises at home that you can turn to if the pain creeps up again.

**Not all exercise is created equal, especially for people with a history of back pain. Swimming and cycling are both excellent activities that do not place your lower back at risk for injury.**



## What if it's not getting better?

If the pain is still around after more than a month, you're likely dealing with an issue related to a disc in the back, the spinal joints or the muscles that help support the back.

Some of the most common issues are:

- **Herniated disc.** Discs are the soft rubbery pads between the vertebrae that make up the spinal column. When the disc slips outside the bone and presses against a nerve, it can be painful. Your physician may order an X-ray or MRI to shed light on which disc is injured. 90 percent of people with herniated discs will not need surgery.
- **Sciatica.** This is specific pain associated with a herniated disc where the disc is pushing on the sciatic nerve, formed by the nerve roots coming out of the spinal cord into the lower back. The pain normally begins in the lower back and moves down your leg, even into the foot. This is most common in adults between the ages of 30 and 50.
- **Spinal stenosis.** This is a narrowing of spaces in the spine that results in pressure on the spinal cord and nerve roots. This is most common in adults over 50, but can be present in younger people born with a narrow spinal canal.
- **Spinal fracture.** Fractures are most common in the middle of the back (thoracic), the lower back (lumbar spine), or at the connection of the two. This is usually caused by a high-impact collision – either a long fall or an automobile accident, but can also occur in with a lesser impact for older adults.
- **Scoliosis and Kyphosis.** Both are curvatures of the spine that are most common in young teenagers, though younger children and adults can also be affected. In many patients, the deformities do not change. In other, rarer cases, the issues get worse over time. Spine stabilization surgery may be needed to straighten the spine by fusing vertebrae together and inserting metal implants to hold the spine in place.
- **Spinal tumors.** Tumors that grow in and around the spine either originate there or are metastatic tumors — tumors that start in other parts of the body and move to the spine. Most metastatic tumors are found in the middle of the back and are not fatal, though the tumors can cause pain and even paralysis.

**About half of people with back pain are healed within two weeks and 90 percent are back to normal within two months. Only 1 percent of people who have back pain will need surgery.**

## What if I need surgery?

Surgery is always the last resort. But, if previous treatments have not worked over a 6- to 12-month period and the symptoms are either the same or worse, surgery may be the only option.

A decision on surgery is tailored to the individual patient and his or her symptoms — keeping in mind the person's long-term health goals and activity level. At Baptist Health, we offer more customized approaches to minimally invasive spine surgery than anyone in the region, as well as traditional open surgery. Our surgeons work with each patient and their family to determine the best approach for the best possible outcome.

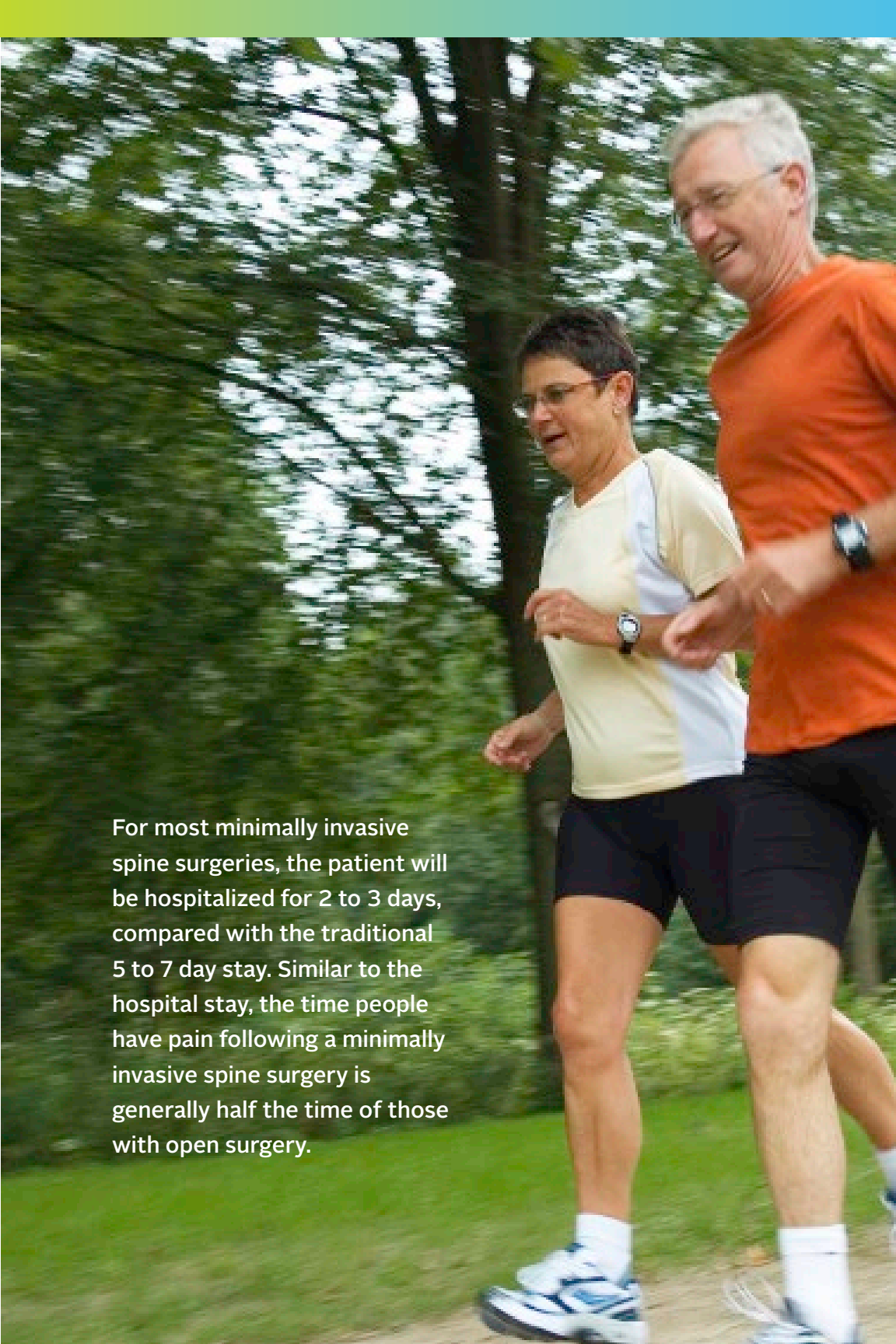
Baptist Health has invested in leading-edge technology and facilities to put the best options in the experienced hands of our surgeons, allowing them to perform more minimally invasive spine procedures that reduce recovery times. Our surgeons, nurses and operating room staff are specially trained to use highly specialized equipment safely and effectively, some of which is available in only a few places in the country.



For instance, Baptist Health is the only health system in Northeast Florida to offer Renaissance, an innovative surgical guidance system used for minimally invasive spine surgeries. Using intraoperative MRI and CT images, neurosurgeons are able to plot out a precise digital road map for each individual's surgery.

Recovery times vary by patient, but are generally shorter when minimally invasive surgery is an option. Some patients are back to unrestricted activity in as few as six weeks.

Physical therapy is critical for completing the recovery and building strength after surgery. Remember, being active can help stave off back pain, and starting under the safe guidance of a physical therapist can help patients build confidence in their surgically-repaired back.

A photograph of an older man and woman jogging together on a paved path in a park. The man is on the right, wearing an orange t-shirt and black shorts, smiling. The woman is on the left, wearing a white and yellow t-shirt and black shorts, also smiling. They are both wearing athletic shoes and wristwatches. The background consists of lush green trees and foliage, slightly blurred to suggest motion. The top of the image has a light blue and green gradient bar.

For most minimally invasive spine surgeries, the patient will be hospitalized for 2 to 3 days, compared with the traditional 5 to 7 day stay. Similar to the hospital stay, the time people have pain following a minimally invasive spine surgery is generally half the time of those with open surgery.

From Baptist Primary Care physicians, to the board-certified surgeons at Lyerly Neurosurgery and Jacksonville Orthopedic Institute, to state-of-the-art technology and facilities and full-service rehabilitative care, Baptist Health offers the most comprehensive and advanced back pain care in Northeast Florida.

If back pain is keeping you from doing what you love, don't put off getting help. Our trusted, expert teams are ready to work with you to develop a customized plan of care to get you back on your feet and back to your life — that's changing health care for good.

Call **904.202.CARE** for a referral physician.

Visit **[baptistjax.com/back-pain](http://baptistjax.com/back-pain)** for more information on minimally invasive spine surgery at Baptist Health.



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