Understanding Back Pain
Back pain affects the vast majority of Americans

Back pain is second only to the common cold for the medical complaint doctors hear most often and for causing people to miss the most work. And back pain is actually the leading cause of disability for people under age 45.

However, common back pain caused by overuse or strain is usually not a long-term condition. For about 90% of people, back pain will go away in 6 to 8 weeks. For some, the pain will subside in 3 weeks or less.

But the fact remains, for many people who have a degenerative condition or a spinal injury, the pain can be persistent and have a big impact on their quality of life. Fortunately there are many courses of treatment, including a number of non-surgical options, that can bring relief. The first step is understanding the possible causes.
What causes back pain?

The human spine is a complicated structure and it can be vulnerable to a number of injuries and diseases. It can also be the source of tremendous pain and discomfort. Almost all the major nerves of your body run down the inside of your spinal cord and branch out between the vertebrae. The vertebrae are separated by disc tissue, which acts as a “shock absorber” for your spine. If the spinal bones or the discs are damaged, it can lead to pain.

Possible causes for back pain could include:

Herniated or slipped discs
This occurs when the soft tissue discs between your spinal bones become compressed or misaligned. It’s caused by wear and tear, or in some cases by injury or accident. When this soft tissue is not doing its job cushioning the spinal bones, the nerves that pass through the vertebrae can become squeezed, causing pain.

Bulging discs
This is similar to a herniated disc, but the disc is protruding or bulging instead of being completely flat. Pain can be intermittent with this condition, depending on whether or not there is pressure on the nerve.

Degenerative disc disease
This condition often occurs as people get older and the discs break down and lose their cushioning ability. This allows the bones to rub together and the nerves to get compressed.
Problems with the sacroiliac joint
The sacroiliac is the joint where your spine and pelvis come together. It's an important area because it transfers weight from the upper body to the lower. Over time, the cartilage in this area can wear down or swell due to arthritis, infection, pregnancy or as the result of an injury.

Spinal stenosis
This is a condition where the spinal canal narrows putting pressure on the spine and nerves. This is more common in people who are late middle aged and older. It will often cause the legs and shoulders to feel numb.

Pinched nerve
This is often caused by a bone spur on a vertebra, or by a herniated disc.

Spondylolisthesis
This condition happens when a spinal bone slips forward and gets out of alignment, typically in the lower back. This is often caused by arthritis that weakens the joints and ligaments keeping the spine in place.

Spine or vertebral fractures
Your back is very susceptible to injuries during car crashes, falls and other types of accidents. If you happen to have osteoporosis that weakens your bones, you can be even more prone to spinal fractures.

Sprains and strains
This is the most common cause of back pain. Injuries to ligaments, muscles and tendons often occur when you lift something and twist at the same time.

Spasms
If you lift weights, exert yourself on the job or play sports, you can sometimes tear the muscles and tendons in your lower back, resulting in painful spasms.

Uncommon causes of back pain
In rare cases, people sometimes develop spinal infections or spinal tumors (cancerous or benign non-cancerous).
Can back pain be caused for reasons other than spinal injury or disease?

Back pain can be caused by a number of lifestyle factors. These can include:

- Poor posture while sitting at your desk
- Improper lifting of heavy objects
- Being overweight
- Not exercising
- Smoking
- Wearing high heels
- Letting stress or anxiety become excessive

In addition to the lifestyle issues listed above, there are several conditions that can lead to back pain, including:

- Arthritis
- Osteoarthritis
- Scoliosis (a curvature of the spine)
- Pregnancy
- Kidney stones or infections
- Endometriosis (a condition of the uterus)
- Osteomyelitis (an infection of the discs in the spine)
- Discitis (an inflammation between the discs in the spine)
- Fibromyalgia (a condition that causes widespread muscle pain)
What are the available treatments for back pain?

There is no “one size fits all” treatment for back pain. It’s important to work with back pain experts and doctors to accurately diagnose the cause and prescribe the right treatment for your unique condition.

Options include:

- Rest and pain management (many back pain issues can heal themselves in time)
- Medication (muscle relaxants, pain relievers, topical pain relievers)
- Injections (pain, anti-inflammatory, steroids)
- Physical therapy (exercise, heat, ultrasound, electrical stimulation)
- Surgery (to repair structural problems such as narrowing of the spine or herniated discs)

What are the advantages of going to the Back Pain Center?

With a wide range of non-surgical treatment options as well as direct access to the neurosurgical experts at Gwinnett Medical Center, the team at the Back Pain Center will work to quickly diagnose your condition and determine the best course of treatment for you. We have everything you need to start feeling better, right here in one location.

All the resources in one location

The Back Pain Center is staffed by back pain experts experienced in back care and treatment, plus highly specialized neurosurgeons who can diagnose, treat and perform surgery if required. Imaging services such as X-rays and MRIs are readily accessible from Gwinnett Medical Center, as well as physical therapy, pain management, and even medical weight management services.
Fast, personalized back pain treatment

At the Back Pain Center, we work to get you scheduled with a member of our team within 2 business days of your appointment request so we can diagnose the cause of your pain and outline the best plan for your treatment. The answer may be therapy. It may be surgery. It may simply be pain management and rest. The Back Pain Center takes a conservative, careful approach with every patient to ensure the best course of care.

Make your own appointment, or get a referral from your doctor

If your insurance does not require a referral, you can contact us directly to make an appointment. For questions about your insurance requirements, call your insurance company or you can call us directly at 678-312-2002 and we will be happy to help you.
Back Pain FAQs

Can I just wait and see if my back pain gets better on its own?
Yes you can. Many back pain issues will heal in time. But if it doesn’t start getting better within a few days, or if it’s a pain that keeps recurring, it’s advisable to seek a professional diagnosis.

I really don’t want surgery.
Are there alternatives for treating back pain?
Yes, there are many non-surgical alternatives for treating back pain. The clinical experts at the Back Pain Center will always consider a conservative non-surgical approach as the first option, such as physical therapy or medication. But in cases where the structure of the spine has been damaged by injury or disease, surgery may be the right option.

Does diagnosing back pain usually require an MRI?
No, an MRI is often not needed. Sometimes a simple X-ray will provide good diagnostic information. Sometimes the spine experts at the Back Pain Center can diagnose issues just by examining the patient and asking questions. But if imaging is required, the complete spectrum of technology is readily available within the building.

What happens when I come to the Back Pain Center?
During your first visit, one of our back pain specialists will evaluate your situation and decide if X-rays or other diagnostic procedures are needed. The object is to determine the nature of your back pain and what treatment might be required.

What insurance plans are accepted at the Back Pain Center?
You can go to gwinnettmedicalcenter.org/BPCinsurance for a complete list of insurances accepted. There are also options for self-pay, if that is your preference.

Do I need a referral to come to the Back Pain Center?
You only need a referral if your insurance provider requires it. Otherwise, you can make an appointment directly with the Back Pain Center. For questions about your insurance requirements, you can call your insurance company or call us directly at 678-312-2002.
Call 678-312-2002 or visit us online at gwinnettmédicalcenter.org/backpain.