



Lumbar Strain

The lower back or lumbar region is a complex structure made up of bones called vertebrae which connect the spine to the pelvis. The vertebrae protect the spinal cord, support the vertebral disks, and act as attachment sites for many ligaments and tendons. The vertebral disks act as a cushion and a stabilizer for the lumbar spine while the spinal cord fingers out through small portals to send messages to the muscles of your legs. There are also many muscles and ligaments that attach to the lumbar spine providing strength and stabilization.

There are several ways to injure your lower back. One way to injure your back is from contact from an outside source causing spasms and swelling. Another way is from bending too far in any direction which stretches the muscle too much. Degenerative traits or muscle imbalances can also lead to pain in the lumbar region. There are so many ways that a person can have back pain, it is hard to narrow it down to one treatment. Prevention is one of the best ways to treat low back problems.

Conservative treatments consist of the usual RICE method; Rest, Ice and Compression. Ice will reduce the inflammation and decrease the swelling in the back muscles. After the first few days of the RICE method, a person can begin general stretching and strengthening of the core trunk muscles. Hamstring and Quadriceps stretching is also important to relieve some of the stress on the lower back. Heating the muscles of the lower back will increase blood flow to the area while also increasing the flexibility and elasticity of the muscle. This is one key factor to loosening up the back before activity to avoid stiffness and tightness in the back. However, it is still important to properly stretch before any activity.

If the pain persists and the conservative treatment does not resolve the symptoms, then an MRI could be ordered to specify the extent of the injury and the injury site. Unless there is damage to the vertebral disk, surgery is rarely an option, and the MRI may better direct the current therapy protocol.

Highlights:

- Prevention with proper stretching can reduce the chance of injury to the lower back
- Conservative treatment along with rest and ice will relieve pain
- Core stretching and strengthening is the key

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