

The aim of the Poplar Grove Practice is to provide a high standard of holistic primary care to our entitled patients by working together as a cohesive multi-disciplinary team.

Our commitment to you, our patients, is to provide you with the highest possible standard of medical care with an efficiently run and friendly service. You will be treated as an individual with dignity, courtesy and respect at all times, irrespective of your ethnic origin, religious belief, sex or sexuality, personal attributes or the nature of your health problems. We expect to be treated in the same way.



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POPLAR GROVE
PRACTICE

Patient Information Leaflet

Non-Specific Low Back Pain

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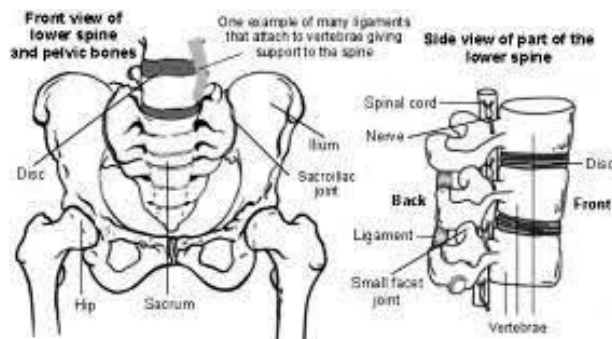
Low Back Pain

About 8 in 10 people have one or more bouts of low back pain. In most cases, it is not due to a serious disease or serious back problem, and the exact cause of the pain is not clear. This is called nonspecific lower back pain. The usual advice is to keep active and do normal activities as much as possible. Painkillers can help until the pain eases. In most cases, the pain disappears within six weeks but may come back (recur) from time to time. Persistent (chronic) pain develops in some cases and further treatment may then be needed.

Understanding the lower back

The lower back is also called the lumbosacral area of the back. It is the part of the back between the bottom of the ribs and the top of the legs.

Most of the lower back is made up from muscles that attach to, and surround, the spine. The spine is made up of many bones called vertebrae. The vertebrae are roughly circular and between each vertebra is a disc. The discs between the vertebrae are a combination of a strong fibrous outer layer and a softer, gel-like centre. The discs act as shock absorbers and allow the spine to be flexible.



Strong ligaments also attach to nearby (adjacent) vertebrae to give extra support and strength to the spine. The various muscles that are attached to the spine enable the spine to bend and move in various ways.

The spinal cord, which contains the nerve pathways to and from the brain, is protected by the spine. Nerves from the spinal cord come out from between the vertebrae to take and receive messages to various parts of the body.

Nonspecific low back pain

This is the most common type of back pain. The majority of cases of sudden-onset (acute) low back pain are classed as nonspecific. This is the type of back pain that most people will have at some point in their lives. It is called nonspecific because it is usually not clear what is actually causing the pain. In other words, there is no specific problem or disease that can be identified as the cause of the pain. The severity of the pain can vary from mild to severe.

What is the cause of nonspecific low back pain?

Nonspecific low back pain means that the pain is not due to any specific or underlying disease that can be found. It is thought that in some cases the cause may be an over-stretch (sprain) of a ligament or muscle. In other cases the cause may be a minor problem with a disc between two spinal bones (vertebrae), or a minor problem with a small facet joint between two vertebrae. There may be other minor problems in the structures and tissues of the lower back that result in pain. However, these causes of the pain are impossible to prove by tests. Therefore, it is usually impossible for a doctor to say exactly where the pain is coming from, or exactly what is causing the pain.

To some people, not knowing the exact cause of the pain is unsettling. However, looked at another way, many people find it reassuring to know that the diagnosis is nonspecific back pain which means there is no serious problem or disease of the back or spine.

How is nonspecific back pain diagnosed?

Most people who develop low back pain that comes on suddenly (acutely) have nonspecific low back pain. If there are no other associated symptoms and the pain is not too bad, many people are confident to just 'get on with it' and treat it themselves - and indeed most get better quickly. However, if in doubt, see your doctor for a check-over and advice.

A doctor will usually want to ask questions about your symptoms and to examine you. Basically, the symptoms are usually as described above, with no other worrying symptoms to suggest anything serious or another cause of back pain.

The examination by a doctor will not detect anything to suggest a more serious cause of back pain. Therefore, a doctor can usually be confident from his or her assessment that you have nonspecific back pain

