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Red Flags for Back Pain



What are the red flags in back pain?

1. Intense sudden and severe back pain

Back pain that is extreme and does not improve with rest or the use of pain relievers available without prescription in the pharmacy, this may indicate a serious underlying issue and requires a visit to the nearest specialized health facility.



2. Pain after injury or trauma

If the pain started after an injury like after a fall, accident, trauma or any type of injury; especially if it is persistent or has noticeably restricted your movement.

What are the red flags in back pain?

3. Numbness or tingling (needle pricks sensation)

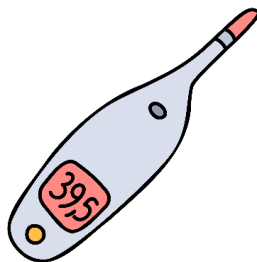
Symptoms such as tingling, numbness, or weakness in the legs and upper extremities may indicate a nervous system or spinal injury.

4. Loss of bladder or bowel control

Inability to regulate urination or defecation is a critical symptom, often indicates serious underlying conditions, such as Cauda Equina Syndrome, requiring immediate medical attention.

5. Back Pain with Fever or Weight Loss:

A fever exceeding 38.3°C or significant, unexplained weight loss alongside back pain may suggest an underlying infection or systemic conditions, including possible malignancy.



What are the red flags in back pain?

6. History of cancer

A personal history of a previous cancer diagnosis can raise concerns about spinal metastasis or other serious accompanying conditions.

7. Age considerations

New-onset back pain in individuals under 20 or over 50 years of age should be thoroughly evaluated, as it may be indicative of various underlying conditions that require careful attention.

8. The prolonged use of steroid based drugs

Long-term use of steroids can increase the risk of osteoporosis, leading to fractures and serious complications including back pain.

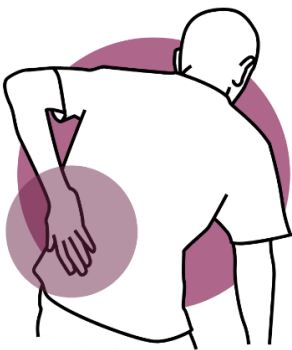


What is Cauda Equina Syndrome?

- Damage to or compression of the cauda equina, a bundle of nerves located at the lower end of the spinal cord.
- Common Causes: such as large posteromedial disc herniation, spinal trauma and tumors affecting the lower spine.

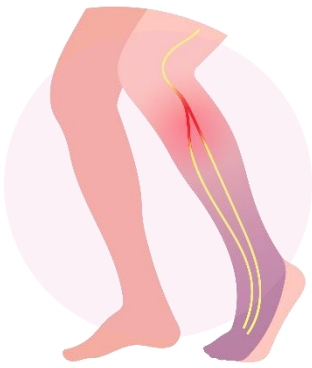
What are the symptoms of Cauda Equina Syndrome?

- Lower Back Pain: Gradual onset, typically affecting one side, accompanied by severe radicular pain.
- Asymmetric, areflexic Flaccid Paresis of the legs and muscle atrophy.



What are the symptoms of Cauda Equina Syndrome?

- Saddle anaesthesia: lack of sensitivity in the anus, genitalia, and inner thighs resembling sitting on a horse's saddle
- **Asymmetric Unilateral Numbness or Paraesthesia:** Occurs in specific lower limb dermatomes.
- **Urinary Retention (Late Onset):** Accompanied by changes in bowel habits due to loss of anal sphincter control.
- **Reduced Rectal Sphincter Tone:** Indicative of neurological impairment.
- **Erectile Dysfunction:** A possible consequence of nerve damage or disruption.



Sources and References:

Mayo Clinic, Advocate Health Car, spine-health.com, uptodate-com.library.iau.edu.sa and Physical risk factors for neck pain.

Scandinavian journal of work, environment & health

All illustrative images from canva.com

Review and audit:

The content of this booklet has been reviewed by Neurosurgery consultants at King Fahd University Hospital.

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IAU-24-615



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