

# Sports Medicine: Schmorl's Nodes

A Schmorl's node is a bulge (protrusion) of the jelly-like contents of the vertebral disc into the growth cartilage of bone (vertebra) above or below the disc. The disc acts like a cushion and shock absorber between the spinal column (vertebrae). It most often occurs in the mid-back in adolescents because at this age the spine is still growing and more at risk of injury.

## Signs and symptoms

- many times there are no symptoms
- muscle spasms or stiffness of back muscles
- occasional aching back

## Increased risk

- sports that increase downward pressure or spine twisting (gymnastics, football)
- motor vehicle accident
- family history of back pain or disc disorder
- males
- poor lifting techniques or sitting with poor posture for long periods
- adolescents

## Treatment

- Medicine can help with inflammation and pain.
  - Anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®) may be recommended. Take these as directed by your health care provider.
  - Other minor pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®).
  - Oral steroids or a steroid injection may be recommended to reduce swelling.
- Cold and heat may be used.
  - Cold should be applied for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours for swelling and after any activity that makes symptoms worse. Use ice packs or an ice massage.

- Heat may be used before performing stretching and strengthening activities prescribed by your health care provider or athletic trainer. Use a heat pack or warm soak. Apply for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Exercises to improve range of motion, strength, and flexibility may be recommended. These can be done at home but often a referral to a physical therapist or athletic trainer may be prescribed by your health care provider.
- Bracing may be helpful in some cases to decrease pain.
- In more severe cases that do not get better with bracing or rehab exercises, surgery may be needed.

## How to prevent

- Do correct warm-up and stretching before practice or competition.
- Use proper lifting and posture techniques when lifting or sitting for long periods.
- Maintain proper conditioning, back and hamstring flexibility, muscle strength and endurance and cardiovascular fitness.
- Maintain a proper body weight.

## When to call the health care provider

Call your health care provider or the **Sports Medicine team** at **(614) 355-6000** if:

- symptoms get worse after 2 to 4 weeks, even with treatment
- you develop numbness, weakness or loss of bowel or bladder functions
- new, unexplained symptoms develop

To schedule an appointment with Sports Medicine, visit [NationwideChildrens.org/SportsMedicineScheduling](https://NationwideChildrens.org/SportsMedicineScheduling) or scan this code with your camera phone.

