



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**

*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.*

**Helping Hand™**

*Health Education for Patients and Families*

## **Sports Medicine: Vertebral Compression Fracture**

A vertebral compression fracture happens when the backbone (vertebra) breaks by being squeezed. This is seen most often in older people who have osteoporosis (Ost-E-O-Puh-Roh-Sis), but can happen in young athletes. In athletes it happens when a strong force pushes the vertebrae together, causing the body of the vertebra to collapse. This is most often seen in the thoracic (torso) or lumbar (low back) spine.

### **Signs and symptoms**

- sudden onset of back pain – common in the mid or low back
- numbness, tingling, or weakness in one or both legs
- an increase of pain with standing or walking
- loss of height or bent posture with a hunched back over time

### **Increased risk**

- adults over age 65
- collision sports (football, ice hockey, lacrosse)

### **Treatment**

- Medicine
  - 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®).
- Use of cold and heat
  - 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.
- Braces
  - A back brace may be prescribed to help with pain control and support.
- Exercises
  - Exercises to improve strength, flexibility, and proper body mechanics are important. These can be done at home, but often a referral to a physical therapist or athletic trainer may be advised by your health care provider.

## How to prevent

- Build strong bones with plenty of calcium and vitamin D.
- Obtain a bone density test if at risk for osteoporosis.
- Use proper sports and lifting techniques.
- Maintain proper conditioning, flexibility, muscle strength, endurance, and cardiovascular fitness.
- Complete the entire course of exercises after injury before returning to practice or competition.

## 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 weeks, even with treatment
- you lose control of bowels or bladder
- new, unexplained symptoms develop

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

