



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™

Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Sports Medicine: Low Back Strain/Sprain

The low back is a complex structure of bone and muscle that is supported by cartilage, tendons, ligaments, and fed by a network of blood vessels and nerves. In the low back these structures are always working to stabilize the spinal column and allow someone to stand upright while being able to bend, twist and move around. Certain motions, such as bending, twisting or lifting, can sometimes lead to a low back strain or sprain. A strain is an injury to muscles and tendons. A sprain is an injury to the ligaments.

Signs and symptoms

- pain in the back, hip or thigh that is usually one-sided
- stiffness in the low back area which causes limited range of motion
- pain that gets worse with movement
- swelling or spasms of the back muscles
- loss of strength in the back muscles

Increased risk

- poor warm up before practice or play
- poor physical conditioning (strength and flexibility)
- previous back injury or surgery (especially fusion)
- family history of low back pain or disorders
- sports that cause spine to twist or bend over and over (football, weightlifting, wrestling, golf, tennis, gymnastics)
- poor lifting technique, poor posture

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®).

- Pain relievers or muscle relaxants may be prescribed by your health care provider.
- 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.
- Corset or back brace
 - A corset or low back brace may be suggested by your health care provider to help support the back.
- Exercises
 - 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.

How to prevent

- Use proper posture and lifting technique.
- Do correct warm-up and stretching before practice or competition.
- Maintain adequate strength, conditioning, lower extremity flexibility and a healthy 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 have loss of bowel or bladder function
- new, unexplained symptoms develop

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

