



Essential Imaging
BC PATIENT SAFETY & QUALITY COUNCIL

Low Back Pain: A Guide for Essential Imaging

Recommendation:

“Imaging is not recommended for low back pain unless red flags are present.”¹

The BC Patient Safety & Quality Council has put together these Essential Imaging Conversation Guides for Patients to support and guide conversations with care providers based on the *BC Guidelines for Appropriate Imaging*.¹

While low back pain can be uncomfortable and challenging, you probably do not need an x-ray, CT scan or MRI.

Back pain usually goes away on its own and people tend to recover after a few weeks. You can help avoid complications and encourage recovery by following a few simple tips.²



Take Action

Here are some ways that you can take an active role in managing your lower back pain:^{1,2}

- Stay active. The sooner you start moving—even if it is gentle range of motion or going for light walks - the faster you are likely to improve.
- Apply heat. A heating pad, warm shower or bath can help to relax muscles.
- Take an over-the-counter pain reliever such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®), ibuprofen (Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®).
- Partner with a professional. Call 8-1-1 to speak with an exercise physiologist to receive individualized care, which can include:
 - Exercises to address your low back pain;
 - Advice on how to increase physical activity; and
 - Support for motivation, education, identifying and overcoming barriers, and returning to work.



Stay Informed

Seek medical attention if you experience any of the following:^{1,2}

- Severe continuous back pain and/or a fever that lasts longer than 48 hours
- Back pain with accompanying pain, numbness or weakness in one or both legs or feet
- Leg symptoms that are more disabling than your back symptoms
- Back pain and the onset of numbness in your genital area or changes in your ability to control your bladder and bowel function

If none of these additional symptoms are present, you likely do not need an imaging test.^{1,2}

Start the Conversation!

Talk with your care provider about appropriate medical imaging.

Learn more and find additional clinical resources at [BCPSQC.ca/imaging](https://www.bcpsqc.ca/imaging).



¹BC Guidelines. Appropriate Imaging for Common Situations in Primary and Emergency Care. 2020. Diagnostic Imaging. Available from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/practitioner-professional-resources/bc-guidelines/diagnostics-imaging>

²Choosing Wisely Canada. Imaging tests for lower back pain. When you need them and when you don't. [Internet pamphlet]. Toronto Canada; 2017. [cited 2020 March 10]. Available from: <https://choosingwiselycanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Low-Back-Pain-EN.pdf>