

Carle Spine Institute

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WHAT YOUR SYMPTOMS INDICATE

Many back problems can get better on their own or with nonsurgical treatment. The key is to understand what various symptoms mean and which symptoms are emergencies and need to be seen immediately by a spine specialist.

+ **DO YOU HAVE ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS:** FEVER, DROWSINESS, SEVERE HEADACHE, NAUSEA OR VOMITING, BRIGHT LIGHTS BOTHER YOUR EYES? *Go to an Emergency Room or make a same day appointment with a spine doctor.*

PAIN IN THE ARM - When pain radiates into the arm, the problem is serious and should be treated by a spine specialist within 48 hours. Pain that shoots into the arm below the elbow can imply a herniated disc in the neck. This may involve weakness, tingling or numbness in the hand. As a rule of thumb, the further down the arm that the pain radiates, the more serious the problem.

NECK PAIN - Pain in the neck can be caused by traumatic injury, like whiplash from a car accident, or more simply from muscle or ligament strain.

LOW BACK PAIN - Pain exclusively in the low back can often be caused by muscle strain. While pain spasms can be excruciating, you may not need surgery. The best treatment for this pain is usually customized therapy with a spine therapist. Cases of low back pain that persist for months are a different story. This is called "axial low back pain." These cases are more difficult to treat and need to be seen by a spine specialist.

LEG PAIN - When pain shoots down the leg, the problem is serious and should be treated by a spine specialist within 48 hours. Pain that shoots into the leg can be an indication of a herniated disc in the lumbar spine. As a rule of thumb, the further down the leg that the pain radiates, the more serious the condition.

BELOW THE KNEE - When pain radiates below the knee, within a week see a spine specialist within 48 hours so that the pain does not become permanent.

+ LOSS OF BOWEL OR BLADDER CONTROL

If you experience loss of bowel or bladder control, go to the emergency room or see a spine doctor within 24 hours. If not seen immediately, the person may lose control over bowel and bladder permanently.

+ **FOOT DROP** - If pain, weakness or numbness extends into the foot so that you are unable to lift it, see a spine specialist within 24 hours. If not treated immediately, it can lead to permanent weakness in the leg.

