

WHAT DO YOUR SYMPTOMS INDICATE?

Many back problems can improve on their own or with non-surgical treatment. However, some symptoms represent emergencies and need to be seen immediately by a spine specialist to prevent permanent nerve damage.

PAIN IN THE ARM: Pain that radiates into an arm below the elbow can imply a herniated disc in the neck. But many times, radiating pain can be treated non-surgically. Radiating pain is a symptom that should be seen by a spine specialist within two weeks.

NUMBNESS/TINGLING/WEAKNESS IN ARM/HAND: Numbness or tingling in the arm or hand is a more serious symptom that is NOT appropriate for watchful waiting. Left untreated, the symptom can become permanent. You should see a spine specialist within 5 days.

PAIN IN THE LEG: Pain that radiates into a leg below the knee can imply a herniated disc in the low back. But many times radiating pain can be treated non-surgically. Radiating pain should be seen by a spine specialist within two weeks.

NUMBNESS/TINGLING/WEAKNESS IN LEG: Numbness or tingling in the leg is a more serious symptom that is NOT appropriate for watchful waiting. Left untreated, the symptom can become permanent. You should see a spine specialist within 5 days.

+ LOSS OF BOWEL OR BLADDER CONTROL - This is an emergency symptom that needs to be treated immediately by a spine surgeon within 48 hours. If you experience these symptoms at night or on the weekend, go to the emergency room. If not seen immediately, the person may lose control over their bowel and bladder permanently.

+ FEVER, DROWSINESS, SEVERE HEADACHE, NAUSEA, VOMITING, UNUSUAL SENSITIVITY TO LIGHT?

While it's rare, these could be serious symptoms related to a neck injury or neck problem. To be safe, you should consult your family physician promptly to determine the cause of the symptoms.

PAIN LIMITED TO THE NECK:

Neck pain can be caused by traumatic injury, like whiplash from a car accident, or muscle or ligament strain. See our Home Remedies section on our Internet site. If pain persists beyond a week, you should see a spine specialist to determine the underlying cause.

PAIN LIMITED TO THE LOW BACK: Pain that is limited to the low back can often be a result of muscle strain. While pain spasms can be excruciating, muscle strain problems do not require surgery. See our Home Remedies section on our Internet site for special stretches that can relieve pain, and the proper use of anti-inflammatories. However, if pain persists beyond a week, it could imply something different than muscle strain, and you should see a spine specialist to determine the underlying cause.

PAIN RADIATING BELOW THE KNEE: When pain radiates below the knee, it could imply a herniated disc. While many times this can be treated non-surgically, you should see a spine specialist within 5 days.

+ FOOT DROP / WEAKNESS IN FOOT: If pain, weakness or numbness extends into the foot so that you are unable to lift your toe as you walk, that is called Foot Drop, which is an emergency symptom. You need a spine specialist within 48 hours. If not treated promptly, it could lead to permanent weakness in the leg.

