

RELIEVE LOW BACK PAIN

Naturally



by Jan McBarron, MD, ND

When that first twinge arises at the base of your spine, you know that a bout with low back pain isn't far off. When it does hit, every little movement hurts—and staying still can feel even worse. If you're like most people, you probably find yourself reaching for over-the-counter or prescription non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to ease the pain. Yet, those options can come with alarming lists of side effects. Fortunately, you can turn to safe, natural solutions that offer quick and lasting relief without the risk.

THE MAIN CAUSES OF LOW BACK PAIN

Low back pain is the most common type of pain among American adults.

In fact, 80 percent of people will experience back pain at some point in their lives. According to the American Chiropractic Association, low back pain is also the leading cause of disability worldwide. But what causes the pain? Let's break it down.

Your lower back is made up of your spine and spinal cord, ribs, cartilage discs, muscles, and nerve bundles. When any of those components shift out of place, the resulting pain can be unbearable—and it doesn't take much to make that happen. The most common activities that can trigger low back pain include:

- Accidents
- Chronic poor posture
- Lifting heavy objects improperly
- Overdoing it at the gym
- Shoveling snow

HOW TO PREVENT LOW BACK PAIN

Your first line of defense involves strengthening your core—the muscles in your back and abdomen—with exercises like planks or bicycle crunches. Other long-term preventive strategies include stretching after exercise or exertion, periodically switching your position when you're sitting for long periods, and paying attention to your posture.

When you know you'll be doing something that increases your risk, approach it carefully. For instance, if you are lifting something heavy, make sure to bend





at your knees and not your back. It's also wise to avoid twisting your back as you lift. But even if you take every precaution, low back pain can strike.

BEWARE STANDARD CARE

Despite overwhelming evidence demonstrating the harm opioid drugs can cause, many doctors still prescribe them for chronic low back pain. In fact, many consider it to be the standard for care. Unfortunately, even a single dose of an opioid drug can trigger addiction. Opioid use has also been linked with a long list of negative side effects including dizziness, nausea, constipation, and respiratory distress.

Even non-opioid pain drugs such as NSAIDs or acetaminophen can cause unwanted side effects when used chronically, including gastrointestinal bleeding, liver failure, and kidney damage. Luckily, you can choose natural solutions to safely soothe low back pain.

5 SUPPLEMENTS FOR LOW BACK PAIN

People have turned to natural pain relievers for thousands of years. Between their historically well documented efficacy and their current success in clinical trials, the following remedies can provide true and lasting pain relief without the risks.

Curcumin. Regarded as one of the world's most powerful natural pain relievers, curcumin quickly tames inflammation and stops low back pain. Derived from the golden spice turmeric, curcumin primarily works by blocking an inflammatory compound called COX-2 that becomes activated when you sustain an injury. Curcumin is even more effective when taken with synergistic herbs. A 2020 clinical trial published in the journal *Medicine (Baltimore)* showed that combining curcumin with boswellia relieved pain and reduced pain intensity within one hour—as quickly and effectively as acetaminophen but without side effects. Curcumin's only potential drawback: It can be hard for your body to absorb. That's why it's so important to look for a highly bioavailable form of curcumin, listed on supplement labels as BCM-95, which has been found to stop pain in numerous clinical trials.

Boswellia. Boswellia blocks a pro-inflammatory compound called 5-LOX, which is often triggered in cases of low back pain. A clinical study published in the *Indian Journal of Pharmacology* found that a single dose of boswellia quickly and effectively increased pain tolerance, reducing the amount of pain felt. The effectiveness of this ancient Ayurvedic herb comes primarily from acetyl-11-keto-beta-boswellic acid (AKBA), its most powerful pain-relieving compound. For the best results, look for a boswellia product standardized to at least 10 percent AKBA.

DLPA. Scientifically known as DL-phenylalanine, DLPA boosts your body's natural pain relievers—your endorphins. These feel-good chemicals act like analgesics to help decrease your brain's perception of pain. DLPA blocks the enzymes that break down endorphins, keeping their levels high and helping you better tolerate your low back pain.

Devil's Claw. This traditional plant's name comes from the tiny hooks that cover its fruit. But this herb's pain-relieving properties can feel heavenly. Devil's claw delivers powerful anti-inflammatory compounds that reduce COX-2 activity by up to 30 percent. Compounds called *harpagosides* provide the herb's inflammation-blocking and pain-relieving actions. For the most potent pain relief, look for a devil's claw extract standardized to at least 20 percent harpagosides.



White Willow Bark. Known as nature's aspirin because of its pain relieving potential, white willow bark contains salicin. When converted to salicylic acid in the body, salicin inhibits the same pathways—COX-1 and COX-2—to relieve pain and inflammation. One study at the University of Michigan found that a daily dose of white willow bark was more effective than a placebo for reducing low back pain. To mimic these results, look for white willow bark that is standardized to contain at least 15 percent salicin. ■



Jan McBarron, MD, ND, advocates a comprehensive approach to health that encompasses both traditional medicine, including prescribing drugs and surgery, and naturopathy. She enjoyed over 30 years in private practice while cohosting the nationally syndicated health talk radio broadcast *Duke & The Doctor*. Dr. McBarron is also an author, philanthropist, educator, and the recipient of multiple awards.