

Acute Back and Neck Injuries: Get the Right Help at the Right Time

by Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS

You're relocating boxes in the garage when you feel a sudden catch in your back — and can't move an inch without pain. Or perhaps that persistent twinge developed after you went a little overboard in lifting weights at the gym. Or maybe you simply moved in an awkward position when you picked up your crying toddler. Whatever the cause of the back or neck injury, you likely will be struggling to decide your next step if the pain doesn't go away — or even intensifies.

What should you do?

First, be reassured that most back and neck injuries don't require medical attention and will get better on their own in 24 to 48 hours. You will want to take it easy, use over-the-counter pain relievers as needed, and apply ice to the injury at intervals for the first 24 hours. Applications of heat may make you more comfortable after that.

When should you get medical help?

If your pain persists beyond 48 hours, worsens or radiates into your arm or leg, you may want to get medical attention.

Most people think they would never be able to get an appointment with a spine specialist immediately, so they go to the Emergency Room, an urgent care center or their family doctor instead. However, as spine specialists, we know that people with back and neck injuries generally will recover faster if they receive the latest evidence-based treatment as soon as possible after the injury.

That's why we offer an Acute Spine Injury Clinic, with special times set aside every weekday during office hours to treat patients with acute injuries. In most cases, a patient with an acute injury can get an appoint-



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Have an acute back or neck injury that's not getting better? Call 336-333-6306 for an appointment in our Acute Spine Injury Clinic.

ment the same day he or she calls — and no referral is necessary unless it is required by the patient's medical plan.

Why is it important to get specialized help right away?

The ER, an urgent care center or your family doctor can provide pain medication and reassure you that nothing is broken, but their focus is not on providing back or neck treatment for the long-term.

At our office, we can perform on-site x-rays, musculo-skeletal ultrasound and other imaging studies to provide you with a fast, accurate diagnosis. We can then prescribe a treatment regimen you can begin immediately.

The multi-disciplinary team in our office includes a fellowship-trained spine surgeon, a fellowship-trained physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist, physician assistants and a complete physical therapy center. We work as a team to provide evidence-based treatment that helps you reduce your pain and recover your mobility as soon as possible.

What can be done for an acute injury?

Treatment for back and neck injuries has changed dramatically over the years — and our job as specialists is to stay on top of the latest advances. We have protocols for optimum treatment of the many different types of back and neck injuries. These may include simple exercises, physical therapy, and injections for pain in some cases. A number of studies have documented the benefits of early intervention in preventing an acute back injury from becoming a chronic injury.

Are there times when you should go to the Emergency Room?

Yes. If your back injury appears life-threatening, you should go immediately to the Emergency Room. In addition, if you experience a sudden loss of bowel or bladder function after your injury or a severe progressive weakness in your arms or legs, you should go to the Emergency Room. Both of those symptoms can indicate a more serious problem that should be addressed in the hospital setting.

Take care of your spine

If you have an acute injury that hasn't improved after 48 hours, seek help so you can get back to your life as soon as possible. To be seen in our spine specialty office for an acute problem, just call the office at **336-333-6306** and request an Acute Spine Injury Clinic appointment.



Max W. Cohen, MD, FAAOS, the founding physician of Spine & Scoliosis Specialists, is the only doctor in the Triad with double fellowship training in spine and scoliosis surgery. He completed his training at Cornell University's prestigious Hospital for Special Surgery, the top-ranked orthopaedics hospital in the U.S., according to U.S. News & World Report.

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