Dear Aching Back,

What a pain in the ?er, back. As frustrating and as painful as it may be to experience lower back pain even after undergoing diagnostic tests and treatment, all is not lost. A second (or third) opinion from a health care provider may be able to provide you with a diagnosis, and hopefully, with an effective treatment. Although its causes vary, chronic back pain may result from repeated bouts of physical strain on the back, perhaps due to changes in how the nerves in the back respond to pain stimuli. Medical conditions that may also contribute to back pain include:

- Strained muscles or ligaments
- Herniated or bulging disk
- Injury
- Osteoporosis
- Arthritis


In some cases, stress may contribute to back pain by causing tension in the back muscles. If you suspect that this may be the case (and this is confirmed by a health care provider), you
You may want to try some of the de-stressing tips in Stress, anxiety, and learning to cope [3] and Number one cause of stress [4] in the Go Ask Alice! Emotional Health archives [5]. Also keep in mind that sometimes the cause of back pain cannot always be determined, although pain management techniques under the supervision of a health care provider may be effective in alleviating the pain.

Additionally, X-rays, which are sometimes used to determine a potential diagnosis for back pain, may not always show problems with the spinal cord, muscles, fibrous tissues, nerves, or disks. Other diagnostic tests include: CT scans, magnetic resonance imaging - MRI, bone scans, and motion and reflex tests. A health care provider can determine which test(s) to use.

You seem to feel unsatisfied with the physical therapy that you were receiving for your back pain. Keep in mind that a number of different options to treat back pain exist. Some people find that visiting a chiropractor or trying acupuncture [6] is helpful. Others may find relief by using hot and cold packs, exercising, resting at home, or taking pain-relievers (such as acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen) when you feel pain. It is always advisable to discuss treatment options with a health care provider beforehand.

You may consider seeing a health care provider (perhaps a different one) for another opinion or for another referral to a specialist.

Even though your back pain may be driving you nuts, seeking other opinions from health care providers may help take the pain off the proverbial back-burner.

Alice!
Category: 
General Health [7] 
Aches, Pains & Other Ailments [8]

Related questions

Exercise motivation... for stress reduction [9] 
Stress is a pain in the neck? literally! [10] 
Uneven rib cage [12] 
Head and muscles ache from stress: What can be done? [13] 
Is neck and back cracking all it's cracked up to be? [14]

Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [15] 
Medical Services (CUMC) [16] 
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If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/lower-back-pain

Links