

Upper Back Pain

What is upper back pain?

Your upper back is also called your thoracic back, the part of the back where the ribs attach. Upper back pain is pain between your neck and your low back.

How does it occur?

The bones in your back are called vertebrae. Back pain is usually caused when ligaments or muscles attaching to the vertebrae are injured. Upper back pain can come from a twisting motion, poor posture, overuse, or an injury. It is very common for someone to injure their upper back when carrying objects, throwing, bending or twisting. Sitting at a desk for a prolonged time can cause upper back muscles to tighten and become stiff. Upper back pain can come even come from vigorous coughing or sneezing.

Sometimes upper back pain is caused by scoliosis, a curve in the spine that has developed during the adolescent growth period. In scoliosis there is usually an imbalance of the muscles of the upper back.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of upper back pain may include:

- pain in the upper back
- muscle spasms
- pain when you take a deep breath
- pain when your back is touched or when you move
- pain when you move your shoulders or bend your neck forward.

How is it diagnosed?

Your provider will take your history, review your symptoms and examine your back.

How is it treated?

The early stages of back pain with muscle spasms should be treated with ice packs for 20 to 30 minutes every 4 to 6 hours for the first 2 to 3 days. You may use a frozen gel pack, crushed ice, or a bag of frozen peas. After you have iced for 2 to 3 days, you may start to use moist heat to help loosen up stiff muscles.

Your provider may prescribe an anti-inflammatory medication, muscle relaxants, or other medication. Massage to the inflamed muscles will help. Your provider will recommend exercises to help your back.

When can I return to my sport or activity?

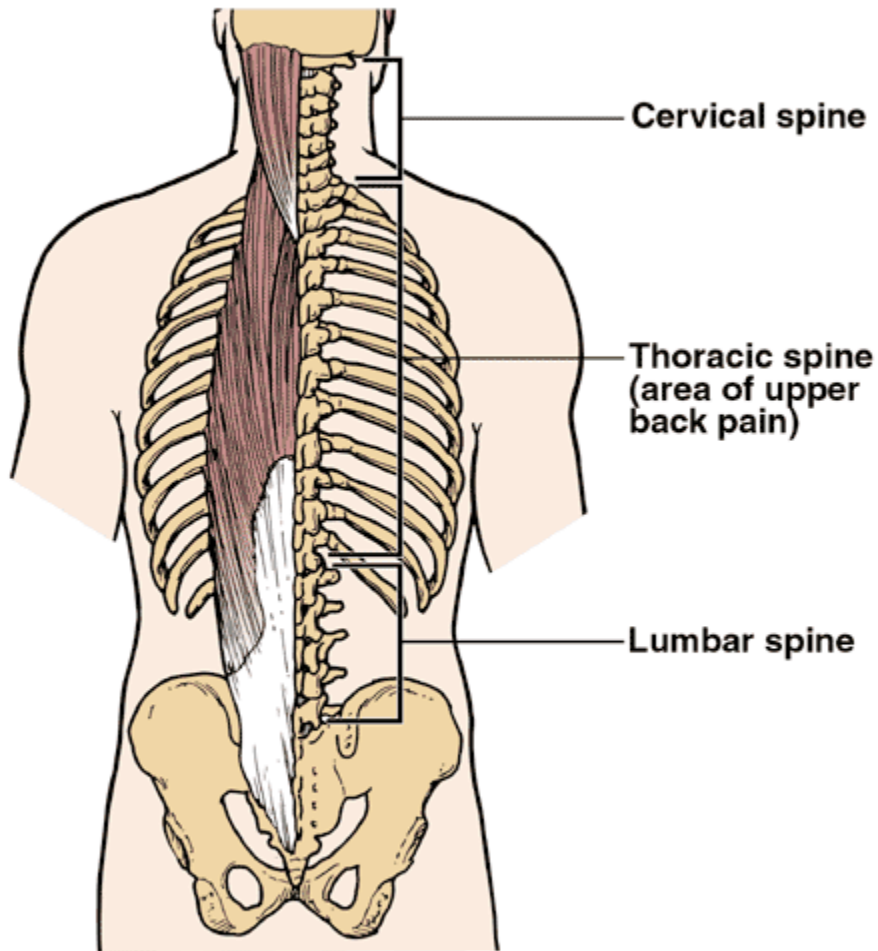
The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your sport or activity as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury, which could lead to permanent damage. Everyone recovers from injury at a different rate. Return to your sport or activity will be determined by how soon you recover, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better.

It is important that you have fully recovered from your upper back pain before you return to your sport or strenuous activity. You must be able to have the same range of motion that you had before the injury. You must be able to run, lift, jump and twist without pain.

What can I do to prevent upper back pain?

Be sure that you have warmed up and have done proper stretching exercises before your activity. Try not to twist when you are lifting heavy objects. If you are at a desk for a long period of time be sure to take frequent breaks to stretch you back.

Upper Back Pain



Upper Back Pain Rehabilitation Exercises

You may do all of these exercises right away.

- **Pectoralis stretch:** Stand in a doorway or corner with both arms on the wall slightly above your head. Slowly lean forward until you feel a stretch in the front of your shoulders. Hold 15 to 30 seconds. Repeat 3 times.
- **Thoracic extension:** While sitting in a chair, clasp both arms behind your head. Gently arch backward and look up toward the ceiling. Repeat 10 times. Do this several times per day.
- **Arm slides on wall:** Sit or stand against a wall with your elbows and wrists against the wall. Slowly slide your arms upward as high as you can while keeping your elbows and wrists against the wall. Do 3 sets of 10.
- **Scapular squeezes:** While sitting or standing with your arms by your sides, squeeze your shoulder blades together and hold for 5 seconds. Do 3 sets of 10.
- **Mid-trap exercise:** Lie on your stomach on a firm surface and place a folded pillow underneath your chest. Place your arms out straight to your sides with your elbows straight and thumbs toward the ceiling. Slowly raise your arms toward the ceiling as you squeeze your shoulder blades together. Lower slowly. Do 3 sets of 15. Progress to holding soup cans or small weights in your hands.
- **Thoracic stretch**
 - A. Sit on the floor with your legs out straight in front of you. Hold your mid-thighs with your hands. Curl your head and neck toward your belly button. Hold for a count of 15. Repeat 3 times.
 - B. To stretch your right upper back, point your right elbow and shoulders forward while twisting your trunk to the left. Hold for a count of 15. Repeat 3 times.
 - C. To stretch your left upper back, point your left elbow and shoulder forward while twisting your trunk to the right. Hold for a count of 10. Repeat 3 times.
- **Rowing exercise:** Tie a piece of elastic tubing around an immovable object and grasp the ends in each hand. Keep your forearms vertical and your elbows at shoulder level and bent to 90 degrees. Pull backward on the band and squeeze your shoulder blades together. Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets.

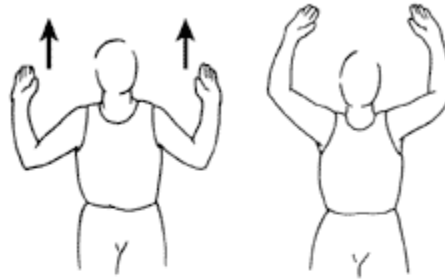
Upper Back Exercises



Pectoralis stretch



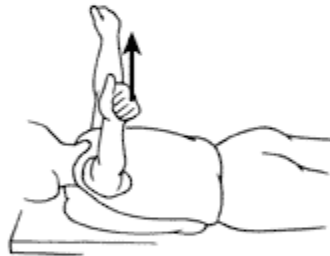
Thoracic extension



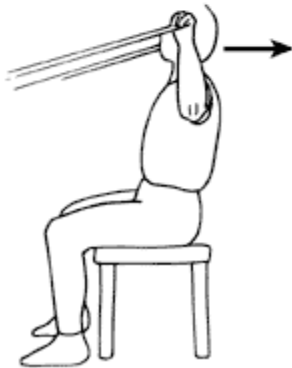
Arm slides on wall



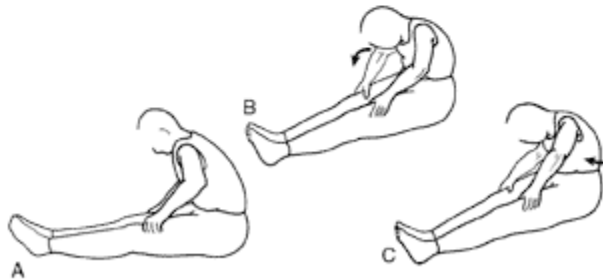
Scapular squeezes



Mid-trap exercise



Rowing exercise



Thoracic stretch