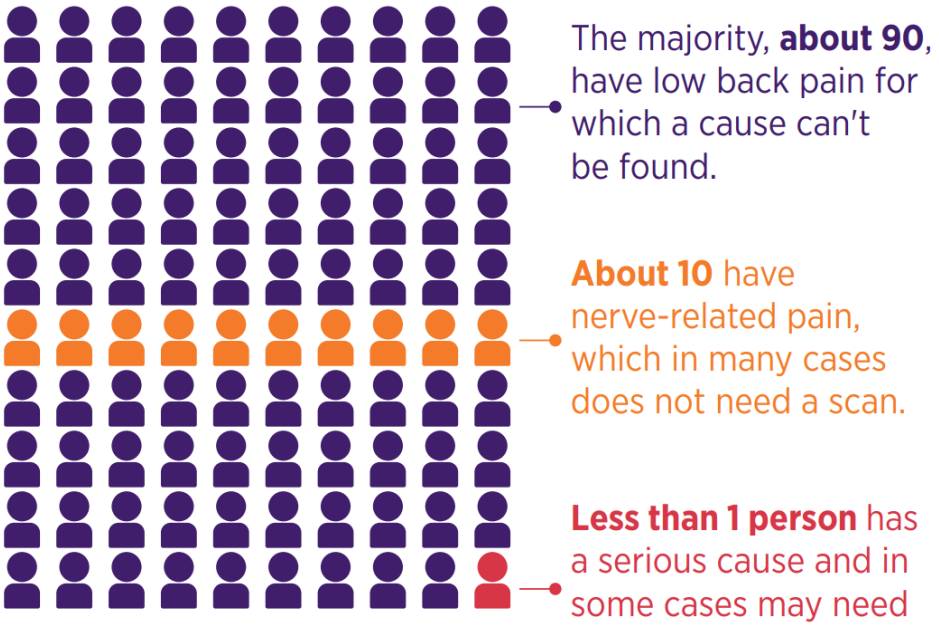
# Low Back Pain

*Low back pain is a very common experience. It is painful and can hinder your daily life. About **90% of issues have no identifiable cause** and will **resolve without treatment in 4-6 weeks.** Receiving a scan (X-ray, CT, or MRI) will not help resolve pain faster.*



The majority, **about 90**, have low back pain for which a cause can't be found.

**About 10** have nerve-related pain, which in many cases does not need a scan.

**Less than 1 person** has a serious cause and in some cases may need a scan.

## Pain ≠ Damage

- Scans may not identify the cause of pain
- Most back pain is managed the same way, regardless of scan results
- X-rays and CT scans use radiation and can harm your health
- Scans can lead to unnecessary procedures and costs.

## When a scan may be needed: *Report any of these signs to your provider.*



- A history of cancer
- Unexplained loss of weight
- Fever over 102°
- Loss of bowel or bladder control
- Abnormal reflexes or loss of muscle power
- Loss of feeling in your legs
- Pain lasting greater than 6 weeks without improvement despite at-home treatment

## At-Home Treatment for Back Pain

**Don't stay in bed:** Start with gentle movements and walking, gradually increase as tolerated

**Apply heat or ice:** Use heating pads, electric blankets, a warm shower to relax your muscles, or ice packs in 10 minute intervals

**Take OTC medicines:** Anti-inflammatory drugs like Tylenol, Advil, and Aleve relieve pain

**Sleep comfortably:** Lie on your side or back with a pillow between your knees

Last reviewed: 09/2025

BOULDER VALLEY CARE NETWORK