

# Chronic low back pain (cLBP)

## Definition

Although the [literature](#) is filled with [information](#) about the [prevalence](#) and [incidence](#) of [back pain](#) in general, there is less information about [chronic back pain](#), partly because of a lack of agreement about definition. Chronic [back pain](#) is sometimes defined as back pain that lasts for longer than 7-12 weeks. Others define it as pain that lasts beyond the expected period of healing, and acknowledge that chronic pain may not have well-defined underlying pathological causes. Others classify frequently recurring back pain as chronic pain since it intermittently affects an individual over a long period. Most national insurance and industrial sources of data include only those individuals in whom symptoms result in loss of days at work or other disability. Thus, even less is known about the epidemiology of chronic low-back pain with no associated work disability or compensation. Chronic low-back pain has also become a diagnosis of convenience for many people who are actually disabled for socioeconomic, work-related, or psychological reasons. In fact, some people argue that chronic disability in back pain is primarily related to a psychosocial dysfunction. Because the validity and reliability of some of the existing data are uncertain, caution is needed in an assessment of the information on this type of pain <sup>1)</sup>.

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Severe [obesity](#), [depression](#), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) should be considered in the development of intervention strategies to reduce the prevalence of [chronic back pain](#) <sup>2)</sup>.

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Disables millions of people across the world and generates a tremendous economic burden. Recent studies estimated the direct and indirect costs of back pain up to \$624.8 billion <sup>3) 4)</sup>

The socioeconomic toll of lumbar disc disorders is enormous, underscoring the critical importance of understanding the pathophysiology behind the degenerative process.

Pain catastrophizing, appraisals of pain control, styles of coping, and social support have been suggested to affect functioning in patients with low back pain.

Back pain characteristics, depressive mood, disability, and beliefs about personal control of pain are related to chronic LBP coping styles. Most of the variables related to advancement of degenerative changes were not associated with coping efforts <sup>5)</sup>.

## Etiology

[Chronic low back pain etiology](#).

## Diagnosis

Rarely can an anatomic diagnosis be made in patients with chronic LBP  $\geq$  3 months duration <sup>6)</sup>.

Patients with chronic pain syndromes (CPS) refer to their problems with affective or emotional terms with a higher frequency than those with acute pain. <sup>7)</sup>.

After 3 months, only  $\approx$  5% of patients with LBP will continue to have persistent symptoms. A structural diagnosis is possible in only  $\approx$  50% of these patients. These patients account for 85% of the cost in lost work and compensation <sup>8)</sup>.

The amount of time that a patient has been out of work due to low back problems is related to the chances of the patient getting back to work.

## Differential diagnosis

[Chronic low back pain differential diagnosis](#)

## Treatment

see [Chronic low back pain treatment](#).

## Case series

[Chronic low back pain case series](#).

<sup>1)</sup>

Andersson GB. Epidemiological features of chronic low-back pain. Lancet. 1999 Aug 14;354(9178):581-5. Review. PubMed PMID: 10470716.

<sup>2)</sup>

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<sup>3)</sup>

Wenig CM, Schmidt CO, Kohlmann T, Schweikert B (2009) Costs of back pain in Germany. Eur J Pain 13: 280-286.

<sup>4)</sup>

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<sup>5)</sup>

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