



**Vasu Pai MS, MCh, FRACS**

## Spine

More than 31 million visits were made to physician offices in 2003 because of back problems

Eight out of 10 people will experience back pain at some point in their lives.

Low back pain is one of the most frequent problems treated by orthopaedic surgeons.

Treatment is multifactorial

### **What is the lower back?**

Your lower back is a complex structure of vertebrae, disks, spinal cord, and nerves, including: **five bones called lumbar vertebrae** - stacked one upon the other, connecting the upper spine to the pelvis

**Six shock absorbers called disks** - acting both as cushion and stabilizer to protect the lumbar vertebrae

**Spinal cord and nerves** - the "electric cables" which travel through a central canal in the lumbar vertebrae, connecting your brain to the muscles of your legs

**Small joints** - allowing functional movement and providing stability

**Muscles and ligaments** - providing strength and power and at the same time support and stability

### **How does the spine work?**

The lower or lumbar spine is a complex structure that connects your upper body to your lower body. This important part of your spine provides you with both mobility and strength.

The mobility allows movements such as turning, twisting or bending; and the strength allows you to stand, walk and lift.

Proper functioning of your lower back is needed for almost all activities of daily living.

Pain in the lower back can restrict your activity, reduce your work capacity and diminish your quality of life.

### **What are the common causes?**

Low back pain can be caused by a number of factors:

Protruding Disk

Osteoporosis and Fractures

Low back Sprain and Strain

### **Prevention**

Back pain caused by lifting can be prevented if you use proper lifting techniques

Regular exercise: improve your muscle strength and overall physical condition.

Maintaining your proper body weight; being overweight puts a strain on your back muscles

Avoid smoking

Maintaining a proper posture when standing and sitting; don't slouch

Recreational activities such as swimming, bike riding, running or walking briskly will keep you in good physical condition.

There also are specific exercises that are directed toward strengthening and stretching your back, stomach, hip and thigh muscles as well as exercises to decrease the strain on your lower back