

## FACT SHEET — AGE-SPECIFIC

# Back Pain in Adolescents and Young Adults

*Why back pain in young people is different — and why it always deserves proper investigation*

## ■ See your GP if your child or young person has:

- Back pain lasting more than 4–6 weeks without improvement
- Back pain that is worse with extension (leaning back)
- Back pain in a young athlete, particularly in high-risk sports
- Back pain with any neurological symptoms
- Back pain with morning stiffness lasting more than 30 minutes
- Back pain in a child under 10 — always investigate
- Systemic symptoms alongside back pain: fever, weight loss, fatigue

## Why adolescent back pain is different

Back pain in young people is more likely to have a specific identifiable cause than back pain in adults. The common adult assumption that "back pain is probably mechanical and will settle" is less appropriate in this age group. Specific conditions unique to or more common in adolescents include spondylolysis, Scheuermann's disease, disc herniation in young athletes, and inflammatory spondyloarthritis.

## Common causes by age

Age group	Common conditions
Under 10	Back pain is uncommon and always warrants investigation. Causes include infection, tumour, and developmental abnormalities.
10–15 (early adolescence)	Scheuermann's disease (abnormal vertebral growth), spondylolysis, spinal deformity (scoliosis), growing pains.
15–25 (older adolescent / young adult)	Spondylolysis and spondylolisthesis, disc herniation, axial spondyloarthritis, mechanical back pain.

## Scheuermann's disease

Scheuermann's disease is a developmental condition in which the vertebral bodies in the thoracic spine grow abnormally, producing a characteristic increased forward curve (kyphosis). It is more common in boys and typically presents during the adolescent growth spurt with mid back pain and a visible rounded posture. Treatment includes physiotherapy, postural exercise, and occasionally bracing. Surgery is rarely required.

## Scoliosis

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Scoliosis is a lateral curvature of the spine. Adolescent idiopathic scoliosis is the most common form, affecting approximately 2–3% of adolescents, more commonly girls. Mild scoliosis is often asymptomatic. Significant curves may cause pain, cosmetic concerns, and in severe cases cardiorespiratory compromise. School screening programmes identify many cases.

## Related fact sheets

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<b>Spondylolysis</b>	The most commonly missed diagnosis in young athletes.
<b>Spondylolisthesis</b>	Vertebral slippage that can develop from spondylolysis.
<b>Axial spondyloarthritis</b>	Inflammatory back pain that typically starts in young adults.
<b>Back pain in sport</b>	Loading patterns and injury prevention in young athletes.

## Get your personalised report — or speak to a specialist

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### Book a consultation

Speak with a specialist. Leave your details and we will be in touch.

Your name

Email address

Phone number

*Best number to reach you*

Best time to call

*e.g. mornings, weekday afternoons*

Preferred contact method

Phone  Video  Email

Briefly describe your back pain

*Main concern and duration*

**Request a Consultation**

We aim to respond within one working day.

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