



Low Back Pain

A Resource for Clinicians

We want to make you aware of the following evidence-based guidelines.

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, low back pain is one of the most common reasons for adults to see a doctor. However, in patients with non-specific low back pain, there's strong evidence diagnostic testing or imaging should not be routinely done¹. Additionally, imaging before 28 days for patients without severe or progressive neurological deficits is unlikely to be beneficial to the patient².

Your role in low back pain diagnosis and treatment

You're on the front line in helping patients manage their overall health. You play an important role in diagnosing, treating, and encouraging the prevention of low back pain.

Risk factors

- Age: Back pain is more common as you get older, starting around age 30 or 40.
- Fitness level: Weak, unused muscles in your back might lead to back pain.
- Pregnancy: low back pain commonly accompanies pregnancy and almost always gets better postpartum.
- Weight gain: being overweight, obese, or quickly gaining significant amount of weight can put stress on the back.
- Occupational risk factors: heavy lifting, pushing or pulling or an inactive desk job especially sitting with poor posture.
- Mental health factors: depression and anxiety appear to have a greater risk of back pain.
- Smoking: keeps your body from delivering nutrients to the discs in your back.

NCQA's Health Care Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) measures the percentage of members with a primary diagnosis of low back pain who did not have imaging, like an X-ray, MRI, or CT scan within 28 days of the diagnosis. Our goal, in working together with you, is to increase these rates to the 90th percentile, indicating high performance. Together, we can close this gap.

NCQA 2017 HEDIS scores

Product	Blue Cross	90th Percentile
HMO/POS	80.11%	82.37%
PPO	80.19%	82.37%

Measure exclusions

Members with the following diagnoses are excluded from the measure:

- Cancer
 - Malignant Neoplasms
 - History of Malignant Neoplasm
 - Recent trauma
 - Intravenous drug abuse
- Neurologic impairment
- HIV
- Spinal Infection
- Major Organ Transplant
- Prolonged use of corticosteroids





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Tips for our members to help improve care

We want to help educate members about their benefits and the resources available to them so they feel empowered to make shared decisions in their care.

- Visit our Back and Neck Care Center on **ahealthyme.com** for the latest information on treatments and pain relief.
- Visit **choosingwisely.org/patient-resources/low-back-pain/** for tips and exercises.
- Recommend no imaging for non-specific back pain.
- Reassure patients about a positive prognosis.
- Educate on prevention and care of a healthy back.
- Advise them to stay active and continue activities within the limits of their symptoms.
- Promote self-management, such as exercise to help prevent a reoccurrence.
- Use Opioids cautiously and responsibly.
- Help your patients develop and stick to a core treatment plan.
- Keep the conversation going.

Learn about referrals and eligibility for:

Physical therapy	Log on to bluecrossma.com/provider . Select Clinical Resources>Outpatient Rehabilitation Therapy
Chiropractic services	Log on to bluecrossma.com/provider . Select eTools>Online Services

Did you know?

We offer qualified members Fitness and Weight Loss Reimbursements. Members can find more information at **ahealthyme.com**.

Members should check that these reimbursements are included in their plan. They can log into Member Central or call Member Service at the number on the front of their ID card.

Clinician Resources

National Guideline Clearinghouse

- Low back pain
 - Visit **guideline.gov** and type in “**adult acute and subacute low back pain**” into search bar.

¹ Chou R, Qaseem A, Snow V, Casey D, Cross JT Jr., Shekelle P, et al. Diagnosis and Treatment of Low Back Pain: A Joint Clinical Practice Guideline from the American College of Physicians and the American Pain Society (October 2, 2007).

² Chou R, Fu R, Carrino JA, Deyo RA. “Imaging strategies for low-back pain: systematic review and meta-analysis.” *The Lancet* 373(9662):463-72. (February 7, 2009)