

Spinal Fractures *From mild to severe*

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EXPERT ADVICE

Compression Fracture Symptoms

A vertebral compression fracture causes back pain, typically near the break itself. In most instances, these fractures occur near the waistline as well as slightly above it (mid-chest) or below it (lower back). The pain often gets worse with standing or sitting for a period of time, and is often relieved by rest or lying down. Although the pain may move to other areas of the body (for example, into the abdomen or down the legs), this is uncommon. If you suffer from these symptoms, be sure to see a doctor to get an accurate diagnosis.

Source: American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons



Understanding the Spine

The spinal column is made up of three sections of vertebrae: the cervical vertebrae (neck), the thoracic vertebrae (making up the majority of the trunk), and the lumbar vertebrae (lower back). Doctors and therapists refer to each vertebrae by a letter, which signifies the section, and a number, referring to the vertebrae's placement in that section beginning with 1 at the top and increasing downward (for example, C5, T7, or L4).

This information is especially important if trauma leads to a fracture in one or more of these vertebra(e). Each section of the spine serves an important function and relies upon the health and strength of the other vertebrae and disks, so an injury to the spinal cord could potentially affect several parts of the body.

Common Causes of Fracture

The severity of spinal fractures varies greatly, depending on the injury sustained. Vertebral fractures associated with major trauma (for example, trauma associated with a car accident,

a fall, a sports injury, etc.) can cause spinal cord damage that results in neural deficits.

However, the most common kind of spinal fracture, the vertebral compression fracture, is tied to aging and osteoporosis.

In a vertebral compression fracture, the bone tissue of the vertebral body collapses. These fractures often go undiagnosed because many patients think their back pain is simply a sign of aging and/or arthritis.

Diagnosis and Treatment

A spinal fracture caused by a traumatic injury will require emergency medical attention. If you suspect a back or neck injury, call 911 and do not move the affected person, as this could lead to paralysis or other serious complications.

If you suspect a compression fracture, see your doctor. Treatment for spinal fractures is typically conservative, requiring rest and a rigid back brace, which prevents movement in the spine while the fractured vertebra(e) heal. Some patients may need further treatment, such as surgery. +