



## Medical Law Perspectives

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## What Do Patients Need to Know to Understand Chronic Back Pain?

Eight out of ten people will have back pain at some point in their lives, making back pain one of the most common medical problems in the world. In fact, it is the second most common reason to visit your doctor's office, with the flu and upper-respiratory infections beating it out as number one. Not only does back pain frequently bring patients in to see the doctor, it is also the leading cause of disability worldwide. When pain lasts for a period shorter than three months, physicians consider it to be acute pain. When pain lasts over that three-month period, the pain is classified as chronic back pain.

There are many reasons back pain develops. Poor posture is one common culprit. When we sit for excessive periods of time, we begin to strain our back muscles and put pressure on the spinal discs. This can lead to back pain. Making sure we remember to sit up straight can help us develop a healthy posture. If you are working for long periods of time at a desk, making sure you get up for regular breaks can help take some strain off your back as well. Another reason for back pain, which unfortunately is unavoidable, is aging. As we get older our discs begin to lose fluid and become weaker and more prone to injuries. Next on the list of common reasons back pain develops is strains and sprains. These are injuries due to overuse or improper use of a muscle, such as sleeping in uncomfortable positions or having excessive body weight. Sometimes these are acute injuries that can be fixed over time. The final reason for back pain is traumatic injury. A car accident, sports injury, or work injury are examples of traumatic injuries. They can cause damage to the disc in the spine and lead to chronic pain.

When you live with chronic pain, it's important to check in with your doctors to keep them aware of any changes in your condition. There are, however, some things you can do at home to help manage chronic pain on your own. First, make sure to stay active. This does not mean running, or doing something that can make your injuries worse. Consider taking walks, or swimming, which can help take pressure and weight off your spine. Taking time for relaxation also is important, whether that means relaxing through the use of meditation, yoga, or by giving yourself a few minutes a day to break the cycle of stress. Hot baths, acupuncture, and massage therapy can also help to reduce chronic pain.

If managing chronic pain becomes impossible on your own, your physician may recommend other options. Therapies, such as platelet-rich plasma injections (PRP), prolotherapy, steroid injections, physical therapy, and spinal cord stimulator implants may allow you to feel more comfortable and may offer relief from your symptoms. If pain is not eliminated with these therapies, pain management medications can be tried. A non-surgical approach to pain management, using other approaches to keep patients from surgery, may relieve back pain.

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Dr. Weil is the Medical Director of the Georgia Institute for Clinical Research L.L.C., and CEO of **Non-Surgical Orthopaedics, P.C.** He specializes in non-surgical orthopaedics and pain management. Dr. Weil has been a Clinical Assistant Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine.

Dr. Weil completed his medical training at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, Texas, obtaining his M.D. degree in 1988. He also received his Executive MBA degree at Kennesaw State University in March

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