

Back Pain Red Flag Checklist

A patient checklist by Dr. Anupam Khandelwal to understand warning signs, sciatica symptoms, and when back pain needs urgent review.

Use this guide after completing the Back Pain Questionnaire.

- Most back pain improves with correct diagnosis, medicines, posture correction, and physiotherapy.
- Some symptoms need early or urgent review because they may involve nerves, infection, fracture, or serious disease.
- Keep a note of pain duration, leg pain, numbness, weakness, fever, weight loss, and bladder/bowel symptoms.

Symptom group	What it can mean	Action
Mild back pain	Muscle strain, posture-related pain, short-term spasm.	Rest briefly, avoid heavy lifting, start guided exercises if pain allows, and review if not better.
Leg pain or sciatica	Nerve irritation from disc, stenosis, or inflammation.	Consult if pain travels below knee, causes numbness, tingling, or limits walking.
Weakness or numbness	Possible nerve pressure.	Early orthopedic/spine review is recommended, especially if weakness is increasing.
Fever, weight loss, night pain	Possible infection, inflammatory disease, or other serious cause.	Do not delay. Seek medical review urgently.
Bladder or bowel change	Possible severe nerve compression.	Emergency medical attention is required.

Before your consultation

- Write when pain started and whether it followed lifting, fall, accident, fever, or long travel.
- Mark whether pain is central, one-sided, or travelling to buttock, thigh, calf, or foot.
- Carry X-rays, MRI reports, prescriptions, diabetes/BP records, and current medicine list.
- Avoid self-starting strong painkillers, steroids, or blood thinners without medical advice.

Simple care steps while waiting for review

Do	Avoid	Why it matters
Short walks if tolerable	Complete bed rest for many days	Gentle movement often reduces stiffness.
Use chair support and neutral posture	Bending repeatedly from the waist	Reduces stress on painful tissues.
Apply heat or cold as advised	Massage over severe radiating pain without diagnosis	Wrong pressure may worsen symptoms.
Start guided physiotherapy when cleared	Random internet exercises during acute pain	Correct exercise depends on diagnosis.
Call if symptoms worsen	Waiting despite weakness, fever, or bladder/bowel change	Red flags need urgent action.

When to contact AKJC

- Back pain lasts more than 1-2 weeks or keeps returning.
- Pain travels to the leg, foot, or causes tingling/numbness.
- Walking distance is reducing or standing becomes difficult.
- You need a decision about medicines, physiotherapy, injection, endoscopic spine care, or surgery.

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Disclaimer: This guide is for patient education only. Red flag symptoms require direct medical assessment. Do not use this PDF as a diagnosis.