

# The Truth About Back Pain

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After 50 years of intense research on the origins of back pain, we still don't know where it comes from. But thanks to Alf Nachemson, M.D. we know much more than we used to. Dr. Nachemson, who died in December, 2006 was a leading researcher in the area of back pain.

In an interview last year, Dr. Nachemson reviewed many of the findings from his 50 years of research on back pain. Working together with many people from other areas, he has discovered:

- It's most likely that back pain comes from the moving parts called *motion segments* but the brain processes pain messages and can't be ignored
- There's more to back pain than just abnormal anatomy or altered structures in the spine
- Poor oxygen levels are linked with disc disease
- Motion and activity are key factors in disc nutrition
- Good body mechanics are important but do not prevent back problems
- Psychosocial factors are better predictors of back pain than physical factors
- Bed rest is not advised; patients with back pain should keep moving and active

More than anything, Dr. Nachemson showed that back pain is a complex problem. There may not be a single answer. It's likely that managing (not curing) back pain is the real key. The solution is going to come from a variety of different places.

The bottom line is that back pain is a normal part of every day life. It doesn't always need medical treatment. It doesn't have to be disabling. Research will continue to investigate the causes of and cures for back pain.

Until a way to prevent and/or cure back pain is found, people should keep active and expect that their back pain will go away.

Mark Schoene. A Tribute to Alf Nachemson: The Spine Interview. In *The BACK Letter*. February 2007. Vol. 22. No. 2. Pp. 13, 18-21.