

Back pain

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Children report back pain less frequently than adults, although >50% will have had one episode by late adolescence. Back pain in a child is a 'red flag' for serious spinal pathology; however, if it is mild, intermittent or occurring only on strenuous activity, it is usually self-limiting. Many adolescents do suffer posture-related discomfort. Physiotherapy to improve core strength and stability reduces symptoms if exercises are performed regularly. Summary box 44.17 'Red flag' symptoms and signs for spinal pathology All 'red flag' signs require urgent investigation with a full blood count (FBC), erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR), C-reactive protein (CRP), plain radiograph and MRI or other - imaging. Other causes of back pain include intra-abdominal, renal and systemic pathology. Summary box 44.18 - Other spinal conditions

Systemic illness, fever or weight loss Progressive neurological deficit Unrelenting or night pain Spinal deformity Excessive kyphosis may be due to Scheuermann's disease Spondylolisthesis is a forward slip of one vertebra on another; it may cause mechanical and, rarely, neurological symptoms Torticollis may be congenital and usually responds to stretching of the sternocleidomastoid muscle Acquired torticollis may be due to one of several significant pathologies Back pain with red flag symptoms and signs requires urgent investigation

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