

# Back Pain at Work: When It's More Than Just a Strain

Most people chalk up a sore back to a long day on their feet or a tough shift doing heavy lifting. And sometimes, that's exactly what it is. But when back pain keeps coming back, gets worse over time, or starts interfering with your ability to do your job — that's when it deserves more than a weekend of rest and a heating pad. At Summit Orthopaedics, we see work-related back injuries every day, and we know how quickly "just a strain" can turn into something that affects every part of your life.

[Work-related injury care](#) is one of our core specialties, and we're here to make sure injured workers in Idaho Falls get the thorough evaluation and personalized treatment they need — not just a quick fix that sends them back into the same cycle of pain.

## The Truth About Back Pain at Work

Back pain is one of the leading causes of missed workdays across virtually every industry. From warehouse workers and construction crews to office professionals and healthcare staff, no occupation is immune. The problem is that back pain tends to be minimized — by employers, by coworkers, and often by the injured workers themselves. People push through it, hoping it'll resolve on its own, and sometimes it does. But often, it doesn't — and every week of delay can mean a longer, harder road to recovery.

[Spine conditions](#) at the root of back pain range from relatively straightforward muscle strains to serious structural problems like herniated discs, spinal stenosis, and degenerative disc disease. The tricky part is that many of these conditions feel similar at the surface — pain, stiffness, limited mobility — but require very different treatment approaches. Getting the diagnosis right from the start is everything.

## What's Actually Causing Your Back Pain?

Not all workplace back pain has the same origin, and understanding where it's coming from determines exactly how we address it. Acute injuries — like a sudden pull during a lift or a fall on a job site — are usually easier to connect to a specific event. But a lot of work-related back pain is cumulative, building up over months or years of repetitive motion, poor posture, prolonged sitting, or consistently overloaded muscles.

Common work-related causes include herniated or bulging discs from repeated bending and lifting, nerve compression leading to radiating pain down the legs, muscle and ligament sprains from awkward or forceful movements, and spinal stenosis — a narrowing of the spinal canal that puts pressure on nerves and becomes increasingly common with age and years of physical work.

The key point here is that none of these conditions diagnose themselves. Pain that radiates into your legs, causes numbness or tingling, or is accompanied by weakness is a strong signal that something structural is involved — and that's not something to wait out.

## When Back Pain Becomes a Spine Problem

There's a meaningful difference between a muscle that needs time to recover and a spinal structure that's been damaged or is actively breaking down. Muscle strains, while genuinely painful, typically improve within a few weeks with the right care. Structural spine problems, on the other hand, rarely resolve without targeted medical intervention.

If your work-related back pain has been present for more than a few weeks, wakes you up at night, shoots pain into your buttocks or legs, or causes you to lose your footing or grip strength, those are red flags that warrant immediate evaluation. Our team is trained to identify these signs quickly and accurately — so you're not left guessing about what's happening in your spine.

## How We Get to the Bottom of It

Every path to effective treatment starts with an accurate diagnosis, and we don't cut corners on that step. When a patient comes in with work-related back pain, we begin with a detailed intake conversation — understanding the nature of the work, how and when the injury occurred or developed, and how the pain is currently affecting daily function. That context matters enormously in shaping what we look for.

Our [advanced digital imaging](#) capabilities are available right here in our Idaho Falls office, which means high-resolution X-rays can be captured, reviewed, and discussed with you during the same visit. There's no waiting for external imaging appointments or delayed results — we get a clear picture of what's happening and move forward from there. When soft tissue evaluation is needed, we coordinate MRI or additional diagnostic testing to ensure nothing is overlooked.

## Conservative Care for Work-Related Back Injuries

Surgery is not where we start — not for back pain, and not for most orthopedic conditions. Our [nonsurgical orthopedics](#) approach covers a wide spectrum of effective treatments designed to reduce pain, restore mobility, and address the underlying cause without putting you on an operating table.

For work-related back injuries, conservative care typically includes activity modification to protect the spine during recovery, physical therapy to rebuild core strength and correct movement patterns, image-guided injections such as epidural steroids or facet joint injections to calm inflammation, and bracing to support the spine during activity. Many patients experience significant, lasting improvement through these methods alone — especially when treatment begins before the condition has time to progress.

We also take the workers' compensation process seriously. Our staff coordinates directly with employers, insurance carriers, and case managers to ensure proper documentation, timely progress reporting, and clear communication throughout the treatment timeline. You shouldn't have to navigate that process alone, and with us, you won't.

## The Role of Musculoskeletal Injuries in Workplace Back Pain

Back pain doesn't always stay in the back. When the spine or surrounding muscles are compromised, it frequently creates a chain reaction — affecting your hips, knees, and even how you walk. [Musculoskeletal injuries](#) that stem from or are compounded by workplace back problems are something we evaluate comprehensively, because treating the spine in isolation while ignoring compensatory issues elsewhere will only get you so far.

Chronic back pain, for example, often leads workers to shift their weight or change how they move to reduce discomfort — and over time, those compensations create secondary problems in the hips, knees, and ankles. A thorough evaluation from our team looks at the whole picture, not just the spot that hurts most today.

## Could Orthotics Play a Role in Your Recovery?

It might seem counterintuitive, but how your feet make contact with the ground has a direct impact on your spine. When foot alignment or gait mechanics are off — even subtly — the resulting imbalance travels up through the legs and into the lower back. For workers who spend long hours standing or walking on hard surfaces, this can be a meaningful contributing factor to chronic back pain.

[Custom orthotics](#) built to your specific anatomy and movement patterns can help correct underlying biomechanical issues that are quietly perpetuating your back pain. They're particularly valuable for workers in trades, manufacturing, healthcare, and any environment that keeps you on your feet for extended periods. Unlike off-the-shelf insoles, custom orthotics are designed around your individual needs — and they can make a measurable difference in how your lower back feels at the end of a shift.

## When Surgery Enters the Conversation

For some patients, conservative treatment does everything it needs to do. For others, the damage to spinal structures is significant enough that surgery becomes the most reliable path to lasting relief. Our [minimally invasive orthopedic surgery](#) options allow our surgeons to address herniated discs, spinal stenosis, and other structural problems through smaller incisions that reduce disruption to surrounding tissue, lower post-operative pain, and support faster recovery times.

We also offer motion-preserving spine technology — including artificial disc replacement as an alternative to fusion for qualifying cervical cases — so patients have access to options that maintain as much natural spinal function as possible. Every surgical recommendation at Summit Orthopaedics is made only after conservative options have been thoroughly explored and the clinical picture clearly supports it.

For workers who've had a prior spinal procedure that's no longer providing adequate relief, [joint revision surgery](#) and advanced spine revision options are also available through our team.

## Your Back Deserves More Than a "Wait and See"

Work-related back pain doesn't get better by being ignored, and it doesn't get better by pushing through it without a plan. Whether your pain came on suddenly after a specific incident or has been quietly building over years of physical work, our team at Summit Orthopaedics has the expertise, the technology, and the genuine commitment to help you recover fully and return to work with confidence.

We handle the clinical side, the documentation, and the coordination with workers' compensation — so all you have to focus on is getting better. Idaho Falls workers deserve nothing less than complete, expert orthopedic care, and that's exactly what we deliver.

[Contact us to schedule an appointment](#) and let our team evaluate your back pain, identify the real cause, and build a treatment plan designed to get you back on your feet — for good.

## Related Questions

Does workers' compensation cover all of my orthopedic treatment at Summit Orthopaedics?

Workers' compensation typically covers medically necessary orthopedic evaluation and treatment for work-related injuries. Our staff works directly with carriers and case managers to verify authorization and keep your care on track.

How soon after a work injury should I seek orthopedic care?

As soon as possible. Early evaluation prevents minor injuries from becoming major ones and creates an accurate record of your condition — which matters significantly for your workers' compensation case.

Can I see Summit Orthopaedics for a back injury if my employer hasn't filed a claim yet?

We recommend contacting your employer about the injury right away. Workers' compensation authorization is required for us to treat work-related cases, and our staff can help guide you through the next steps.

What if my back pain developed gradually from years of physical work rather than one specific incident?

Cumulative or repetitive-use injuries are absolutely covered under workers' compensation. Our team documents these cases thoroughly, including the occupational history that contributed to your condition.