

# Low back pain: Suffered according to age

**L**ow back pain is one of the most common health complaints in the world. However, it is not the same for everyone. Its causes and seriousness vary with age, occupation, and lifestyle. Understanding these differences helps one know when to seek care, what to do at home, and when the pain might be a sign of something more serious.

A recent review of studies from across sub-Saharan Africa estimated that among working adults in the region, around 55% experienced low back pain in the previous year.

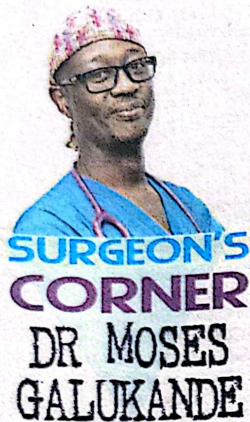
## HOSPITAL-BASED ANALYSIS

In Uganda specifically, the estimated prevalence was even higher, at about 61%. Local studies from hospitals in Uganda also confirm that back pain is common.

A hospital-based analysis in Kampala found that nearly 45% of patients attending a physiotherapy clinic had low back pain, with adults aged 30–39 years being most affected.

Another study at a national referral hospital reported around 20% prevalence among all orthopaedic outpatients, with most cases being “non-specific” – meaning no single disease or condition could be identified. Even among specific groups like health workers, back pain is frequently reported.

In one study in one district, almost 40% of healthcare staff experienced lower back pain, with risk factors including repeated lifting, bending, and long hours standing or in awkward positions.



**SURGEON'S CORNER**  
**DR MOSES GALUKANDE**

## CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

Back pain in children is less common than in adults, but when it does occur, it needs careful attention.

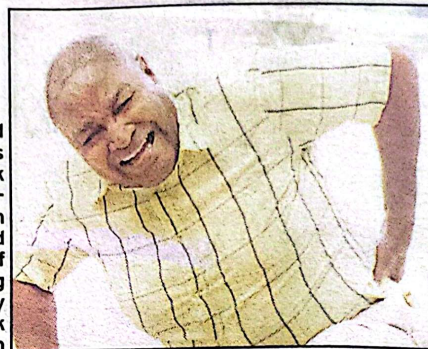
Carrying heavy school bags over long distances, poor posture on benches or while using phones, and sports injuries are frequent triggers.

The back pain that persists, wakes a child at night, or comes with fever, limp, or weakness, should prompt urgent medical assessment because, unlike in adults, there may be an underlying condition such as infection or early spine problems.

## YOUNG ADULTS OF 20-35 YEARS

This is one of the most affected age groups in Uganda. People in their 20s and early 30s often juggle physically demanding tasks, sedentary office work, and long travel times, which strain the back.

An adult aged above 55 years expressing back pain. A hospital-based analysis in Kampala found that nearly 45% of patients attending a physiotherapy clinic had low back pain



## SELF-CARE TIPS FOR A HEALTHIER BACK

Low back pain doesn't just hurt – it affects everyday life especially when it is chronic and may have real effects on: physical ability, mood, sleep, and work.

No matter your age or job, here are steps you can take to prevent, stop or get relief of back pain.

- Take short breaks from sitting or standing.
- Use proper lifting techniques (bend knees, keep back straight).
- Strengthen core muscles with gentle exercise.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Choose supportive chairs and mattresses when possible.

For persistent pain lasting more than 4–6 weeks, or when neurological signs appear, seek professional care early.

For example, bodaboda riders endure constant vibration and poor seat support. Farmers bend and lift repeatedly. Office workers sit for long hours with poor back support.

Local research also suggests that poor posture, workplace ergonomics, stress, sleep quality, and previous injuries contribute to back pain among young adults.

## MIDDLE AGED OF 35-55 YEARS

In this age bracket, often the family breadwinner's back pain can become chronic and recurrent. Wear and tear of spinal discs, early arthritis, and poor lifelong body mechanics contribute to pain. The middle-aged may notice pain that radiates down the legs, flares after prolonged sitting or standing and interferes with sleep.

While scans are not always needed, persistent pain or neurological symptoms like numbness or weakness should prompt a health evaluation. Early physical therapy and lifestyle adjustments often offer the best long-term relief.

## OLDER ADULTS - ABOVE 55 YEARS

In older Ugandans, back pain can sometimes signal more serious problems like Degenerative arthritis, spinal canal narrowing, osteoporotic fractures, or, less commonly, infections or cancers that spread to the spine. Studies in Uganda show that back pain in older patients often lasts more than a year and is associated with reduced quality of life, especially among manual labourers and people who are unemployed. Older adults should seek care if back pain gets to this point: When it limits walking, causes weakness or numbness and when it comes with unintended weight loss or fever. Research among specific groups shows how work affects back health: These findings show that the workplace environment, not just age, plays a big role in back pain – especially in jobs requiring physical labour.

## WOMEN AND BACK PAIN

Several studies show that women, including Ugandan women, tend to report back pain more often than men. This may reflect a combination of biological, social and work-related factors, including care-giving roles, repetitive home tasks, and limited access to ergonomic supports

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What makes women

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