



## DECISION AID

### Spinal diseases:

### What are your treatment options?

You have been diagnosed with a spinal disease that is very likely the cause of your back pain. The type of symptoms you have, how they develop over time, and the examinations you need will depend on the spine problem.

There may also be different treatment options for different spine problems: These often include medication, non-drug treatments like mobility and strength exercises, or spinal surgery. Each spine problem can often be treated in different ways. The various treatments are sometimes used as alternatives to each other, together, or as part of a treatment program.

This decision aid is designed to help you get an overview of the treatment options together with your doctor, and then choose one or more suitable treatments.

#### GOOD TO KNOW

Additional decision aids are available for some specific spinal diseases. They can help you to decide which treatment is right for you. In those cases, you also have a right to a second medical opinion free of charge. You can find out which conditions this applies to at

[www.informedhealth.org/SecondOpinion](http://www.informedhealth.org/SecondOpinion)

#### MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION

This decision aid probably won't include all of the information that you need. You will still need to talk to a doctor, but the decision aid can help you. Your treatment decision will depend on other factors too, like your overall health and what you would expect from surgery, which treatments you have already tried and how effective they were.



Even if you find the symptoms very distressing, take the time to find out what you want to know and don't let anyone pressure you into making a decision.

## WHAT TREATMENTS ARE YOU CONSIDERING FOR YOUR DECISION?

Write down the main options and any alternatives that you would like to consider:

Option 1

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Option 2

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Option 3

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If you find it difficult to think of options, you can talk to your doctor. Here is a list of **typical treatments for spinal diseases**:

- Non-drug interventions:
  - Exercise, relaxation and positioning
  - Physical, passive or manual therapy
  - Occupational therapy
  - Behavioral therapy – e.g. for pain management
  - Internet-based treatment programs – for instance, with back exercises
- Medications:
  - Painkillers like ibuprofen
  - Stronger painkillers that have to be prescribed by a doctor
  - Injections near the spine to reduce pain or inflammation
- Surgery – for instance, to relieve pressure on nerves and blood vessels, to stabilize the spine, or to relieve pain

It is often a good idea to combine different treatments, such as medication and non-drug interventions. Particularly if the symptoms last a long time or become chronic, this can be done as part of a multimodal treatment program. Various surgical treatments may be combined, too – for example, if the spine has to be stiffened but pressure has to be relieved from nerves and blood vessels before doing that.

## OVERVIEW OF TREATMENT OPTIONS

Make a note of the following here:	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<b>What does the treatment involve?</b>  Is medication taken orally or injected? For how long and how often? Is a general anesthetic needed for surgery? What about a stay in the hospital?			
<b>What is the aim of the treatment?</b>  Does it aim to relieve symptoms? Or does it aim to get rid of the cause?			
<b>How effective is the treatment likely to be?</b>  How many people feel better after the treatment? Are the symptoms relieved somewhat or do they go away completely? Do the benefits last long?			

## OVERVIEW OF TREATMENT OPTIONS

Make a note of the following here:	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
<p><b>What are the possible side effects?</b></p> <p>What side effects might medication have? What are the possible complications of surgery?</p>			
<p><b>What can (or should) you do on your own?</b></p> <p>Do you have to play an active role in the treatment – in the short or long term?</p>			
<p><b>Is the treatment an option for you?</b></p> <p>What symptoms is the treatment suitable for, and as of when? Can you combine treatments? Do you have other medical conditions that mean the treatment isn't suitable? Or do you take medications that can cause interactions? Which treatment is most suitable for your daily life and best meets your expectations?</p>			

## HELP WITH YOUR DECISION

You may still be unsure about which treatment you would prefer. You can write down your thoughts and questions on the following two pages.

Which treatment would you consider?		What do you like about it?	What don't you like about it?
Option 1 _____	<input type="radio"/>		
Option 2 _____	<input type="radio"/>		
Option 3 _____	<input type="radio"/>		







## IF YOU STILL AREN'T SURE: WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED IN ORDER TO MAKE A DECISION?

With all the different pros and cons to consider, it can be hard to choose a treatment – and sometimes the pros and cons of a treatment are not yet known.

If you need more help:

- You will find links to further information on the next page.
- You can talk to your doctor again.
- You can also talk to a different doctor. When it comes to surgery, doctors even have to point out this option. You will find information about second medical opinions on the next page.
- You can discuss the options with family and friends.
- You can contact a patient information center or a support group.

## YOU WILL FIND IN-DEPTH INFORMATION ABOUT THE FOLLOWING TOPICS ON THE INTERNET:

	<b>Low back pain</b> <a href="http://www.informedhealth.org/low-back-pain.html">www.informedhealth.org/low-back-pain.html</a>
	<b>Living with chronic back pain</b> <a href="http://www.informedhealth.org/living-with-chronic-back-pain.html">www.informedhealth.org/living-with-chronic-back-pain.html</a>
	<b>Understanding chronic pain</b> <a href="http://www.informedhealth.org/understanding-chronic-pain.html">www.informedhealth.org/understanding-chronic-pain.html</a>
	<b>At the hospital</b> <a href="http://www.informedhealth.org/at-the-hospital.html">www.informedhealth.org/at-the-hospital.html</a>
	<b>Surgery</b> <a href="http://www.informedhealth.org/surgery.html">www.informedhealth.org/surgery.html</a>
	<b>Second medical opinions</b> <a href="http://www.informedhealth.org/SecondOpinion">www.informedhealth.org/SecondOpinion</a>

## PREPARING FOR THE DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT

What remains unanswered? What concerns do you still have? Write down any questions or thoughts you may have, and take this decision aid with you to the appointment. You can ask the doctor about anything you would like to know, or discuss anything you are worried about.

There's a list of possible questions here:

[www.informedhealth.org/questions](http://www.informedhealth.org/questions)

## PUBLISHING DETAILS

This decision aid was developed by the Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG, Germany). You will find information about our work and the sources used here:

[www.informedhealth.org/our-approach](http://www.informedhealth.org/our-approach)

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