

The Office: That Back-Hurting Sport — How to Avoid It Without Lying Down?



Lower back pain, discomfort while sitting, stiffness after a day at the office... What if it didn't have to be that way? Back pain is common, but often preventable. Let's sort fact from fiction, share the right habits, and most importantly, help you keep moving at work without ending up bent in half.

What is lower back pain?

Lower back pain refers to discomfort located in the lower part of the back, around the lumbar vertebrae. It is the most common musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) in the workplace and one of the leading causes of sick leave in France.

In a professional setting, it can be linked to several factors:

- Physical (lifting loads, prolonged postures)
- Organizational (fast-paced work, lack of breaks)
- Psychosocial (stress, job dissatisfaction)

In most cases, lower back pain is mild and improves with continued appropriate activity and good daily habits.

Prevention goal: detect early, take action, and avoid chronic pain.

Keywords

8 out of 10 people	will experience lower back pain at some point in their lives.
#1 cause of sick leave	in France (according to the National Health Insurance).
30–40%	of work-related MSDs are lower back pains.
Most episodes heal	in less than 6 weeks, without heavy treatment.

Common Misconceptions: False Beliefs to Let Go Of

■ “I’m in pain, so I need complete rest.”

✓■ False! Strict rest often makes things worse. A gentle and gradual return to activity is the best therapy.

■ “An X-ray or MRI will explain my pain.”

✓■ Not always. Visible abnormalities are common even in people without pain. Imaging is only useful if the pain lasts more than 7 weeks or if there are serious warning signs.

■ “Back pain is all in your head.”

✓■ No, but stress, anxiety, or a negative work environment can make it worse.

Good habits to adopt at work

- Move regularly: stand up every 30 minutes to stretch or take a few steps.
- Adjust your workstation: chair with lumbar support, screen at eye level.
- Engage in regular physical activity: walking, swimming, yoga, Pilates.
- Manage stress: relaxation, breathing exercises, regular breaks.

When do I need to worry?

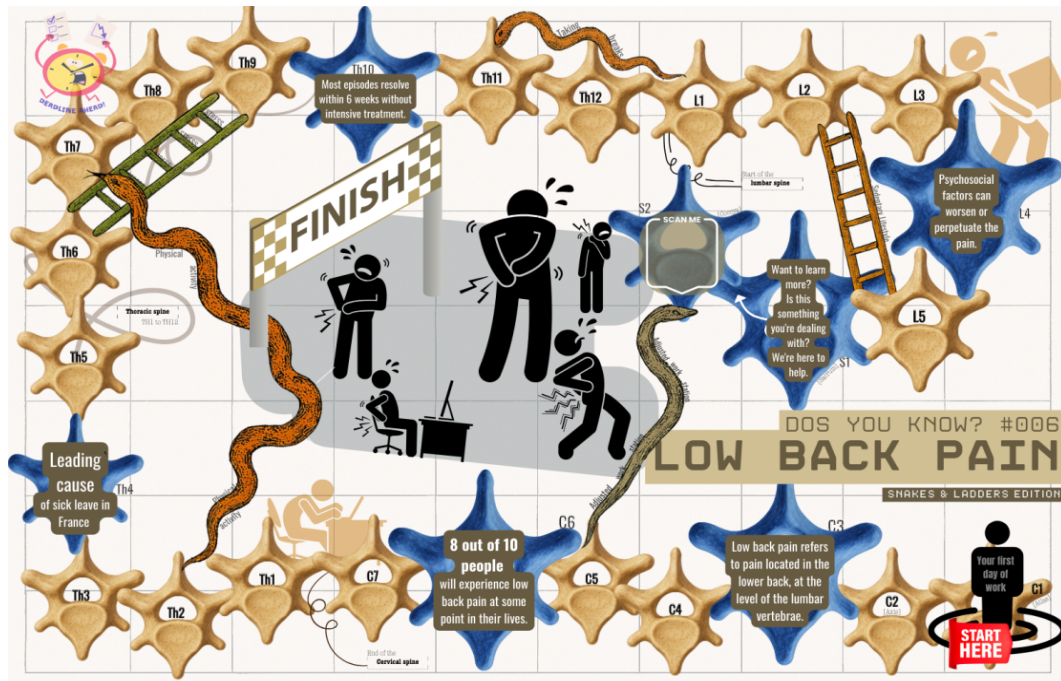
Consult a doctor promptly if you experience sudden pain following an injury, loss of strength or sensation in the legs, persistent pain lasting more than 7 weeks, fever, unexplained weight loss, or a known cancer diagnosis.

Otherwise, it's not an emergency: no need for imaging or extended sick leave.

Take a quick self-assessment questionnaire on back pain at work if you're unsure. **Click here.**

What your Occupational Health Service (OHS) can offer

Postural education, prevention of psychosocial and musculoskeletal disorders, and consultations for workstation adjustments. **Click here.**



Physical activity recommendations (WHO, HAS, Santé Publique France)

- 150–300 min of moderate-intensity or 75–150 min of vigorous activity per week
- Muscle strengthening at least twice a week
- Avoid sitting too long — move every hour

These are minimum thresholds for maintaining health. Every bit of activity counts!

Further reading: Ameli, INRS, HAS, recent scientific studies (Hartvigsen J., Foster NE., Traeger AC., O'Sullivan K.)