

# Diagnostic Triage Flow Chart of a patient presenting with low back pain with or without sciatica

**What is the back pain due to?**

A problem in the back

Yes

A problem elsewhere  
(eg. abdomen, G U, systemic)

Yes

Diagnose and manage appropriately

**Is there a spinal cord or cauda equina lesion?**

Yes

Emergency referral to a spinal surgeon

No

**Spinal cord or cauda equina lesion?**

Sphincter disturbance	(- Incontinence)
Gait disturbance	(- due to neurological changes not due to pain)
Saddle anaesthesia	(- Loss of sensation in the anal or vulval areas)

**Back pain diagnostic triage**

**Possible serious spinal pathology**

**Red Flags**

- Presentation age <20 or >55
- Non-mechanical pain
- Thoracic pain
- PH-carcinoma, steroids, HIV
- Unwell, weight loss
- Widespread neurology
- Structural deformity

**Nerve root problem**

- Unilateral leg pain >LBP
- Radiates to foot or toes
- Numbness & anaesthesia in same distribution
- SLR reproduces leg pain
- Localised neurology

**Simple backache**

- Presentation age 20-55 years
- Lumbrosacral, buttocks & thighs
- "Mechanical" pain
- Patient well

**Is there severe or progressive motor weakness?**

Yes

No

Primary Care Management

Primary Care Management

**Is it settling?**

No

Yes

Continued Primary Care Management

**Urgent Specialist Referral**

Hospital Referral

Return to Work