

# 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

Nerve root problem

Simple backache

### Red Flags

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

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

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

Primary Care Management

Yes

Is there severe or progressive motor weakness?

No

Primary Care Management

Is it settling?

No

Continued Primary Care Management

Yes

Urgent Specialist Referral

Hospital Referral

Return to Work