

compression fractures associated with debilitating pain, these procedures are not routinely recommended.

Osteosclerosis, an abnormally increased bone density often due to Paget's disease, is readily identifiable on routine x-ray studies and can sometimes be a source of back pain. It may be associated with an isolated increase in alkaline phosphatase in an otherwise healthy older person. Spinal cord or nerve root compression can result from bony encroachment. The diagnosis of Paget's disease as the cause of a patient's back pain is a diagnosis of exclusion.

For further discussion of these bone disorders, see Chaps. 424, 425, and 426e.

AUTOIMMUNE INFLAMMATORY ARTHRITIS

Autoimmune inflammatory disease of the spine can present with the insidious onset of low back, buttock, or neck pain. Examples include rheumatoid arthritis (**Chap 380**), ankylosing spondylitis, reactive arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, or inflammatory bowel disease (**Chap. 384**).

CONGENITAL ANOMALIES OF THE LUMBAR SPINE

Spondylolysis is a bony defect in the vertebral pars interarticularis (a segment near the junction of the pedicle with the lamina); the cause is usually a stress microfracture in a congenitally abnormal segment. It occurs in up to 6% of adolescents. The defect (usually bilateral) is best visualized on plain x-rays, CT scan, or bone scan and is frequently asymptomatic. Symptoms may occur in the setting of a single injury, repeated minor injuries, or during a growth spurt. Spondylolysis is the most common cause of persistent low back pain in adolescents and is often associated with sports-related activities.

Scoliosis refers to an abnormal curvature in the coronal (lateral) plane of the spine. With *kyphoscoliosis*, there is, in addition, a forward curvature of the spine. The abnormal curvature may be congenital due to abnormal spine development, acquired in adulthood due to degenerative spine disease, or occasionally progressive due to neuromuscular disease. The deformity can progress until ambulation or pulmonary function is compromised.

Spina bifida occulta is a failure of closure of one or several vertebral arches posteriorly; the meninges and spinal cord are normal. A dimple or small lipoma may overlie the defect. Most cases are asymptomatic and discovered incidentally during an evaluation for back pain.

Tethered cord syndrome usually presents as a progressive cauda equina disorder (see below), although myelopathy may also be the initial manifestation. The patient is often a young adult who complains of perineal or perianal pain, sometimes following minor trauma. MRI studies reveal a low-lying conus (below L1 and L2) and a short and thickened filum terminale.

REFERRED PAIN FROM VISCERAL DISEASE

Diseases of the thorax, abdomen, or pelvis may refer pain to the posterior portion of the spinal segment that innervates the diseased organ. Occasionally, back pain may be the first and only manifestation. Upper abdominal diseases generally refer pain to the lower thoracic or upper lumbar region (eighth thoracic to the first and second lumbar vertebrae), lower abdominal diseases to the midlumbar region (second to fourth lumbar vertebrae), and pelvic diseases to the sacral region. Local signs (pain with spine palpation, paraspinal muscle spasm) are absent, and little or no pain accompanies routine movements of the spine.

Low Thoracic or Lumbar Pain with Abdominal Disease Tumors of the posterior wall of the stomach or duodenum typically produce epigastric pain (**Chaps. 109 and 348**), but midline back or paraspinal pain may occur if retroperitoneal extension is present. Fatty foods occasionally induce back pain associated with biliary disease. Diseases of the pancreas can produce right or left paraspinal back pain. Pathology in retroperitoneal structures (hemorrhage, tumors, pyelonephritis) can produce paraspinal pain that radiates to the lower abdomen, groin, or anterior thighs. A mass in the iliopsoas region can produce unilateral lumbar pain with radiation toward the groin, labia, or testicle. The sudden appearance of lumbar pain in a patient receiving anticoagulants suggests retroperitoneal hemorrhage.

Isolated low back pain occurs in some patients with a contained rupture of an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA). The classic clinical triad of abdominal pain, shock, and back pain occurs in <20% of patients. The typical patient at risk is an elderly male smoker with back pain. The diagnosis may be missed because the symptoms and signs can be nonspecific. Misdiagnoses include nonspecific back pain, diverticulitis, renal colic, sepsis, and myocardial infarction. A careful abdominal examination revealing a pulsatile mass (present in 50–75% of patients) is an important physical finding. Patients with suspected AAA should be evaluated with abdominal ultrasound, CT, or MRI (**Chap. 301**).

Sacral Pain with Gynecologic and Urologic Disease Pelvic organs rarely cause low back pain, except for gynecologic disorders involving the uterosacral ligaments. The pain is referred to the sacral region. Endometriosis or uterine cancers may invade the uterosacral ligaments. Pain associated with endometriosis is typically premenstrual and often continues until it merges with menstrual pain. Uterine malposition may cause uterosacral ligament traction (retroversion, descensus, and prolapse) or produce sacral pain after prolonged standing.

Menstrual pain may be felt in the sacral region sometimes with poorly localized, cramping pain radiating down the legs. Pain due to neoplastic infiltration of nerves is typically continuous, progressive in severity, and unrelieved by rest at night. Less commonly, radiation therapy of pelvic tumors may produce sacral pain from late radiation necrosis of tissue. Low back pain that radiates into one or both thighs is common in the last weeks of pregnancy.

Urologic sources of lumbosacral back pain include chronic prostatitis, prostate cancer with spinal metastasis (**Chap. 115**), and diseases of the kidney or ureter. Lesions of the bladder and testes do not often produce back pain. Infectious, inflammatory, or neoplastic renal diseases may produce ipsilateral lumbosacral pain, as can renal artery or vein thrombosis. Paraspinal lumbar pain may be a symptom of ureteral obstruction due to nephrolithiasis.

OTHER CAUSES OF BACK PAIN

Postural Back Pain There is a group of patients with nonspecific chronic low back pain (CLBP) in whom no specific anatomic lesion can be found despite exhaustive investigation. These individuals complain of vague, diffuse back pain with prolonged sitting or standing that is relieved by rest. Exercises to strengthen the paraspinal and abdominal muscles are sometimes helpful.

Psychiatric Disease CLBP may be encountered in patients who seek financial compensation; in malingerers; or in those with concurrent substance abuse. Many patients with CLBP have a history of psychiatric illness (depression, anxiety states) or childhood trauma (physical or sexual abuse) that antedates the onset of back pain. Preoperative psychological assessment has been used to exclude patients with marked psychological impairments that predict a poor surgical outcome from spine surgery.

IDIOPATHIC

The cause of low back pain occasionally remains unclear. Some patients have had multiple operations for disk disease but have persistent pain and disability. The original indications for surgery may have been questionable, with back pain only, no definite neurologic signs, or a minor disk bulge noted on CT or MRI. Scoring systems based on neurologic signs, psychological factors, physiologic studies, and imaging studies have been devised to minimize the likelihood of unsuccessful surgery.

TREATMENT BACK PAIN

HEALTH CARE FOR POPULATIONS OF BACK PAIN PATIENTS: A CLINICAL CARE SYSTEMS VIEW

There are increasing pressures to contain health care costs, especially when expensive care is not based on sound evidence. Physicians, patients, the insurance industry, and government providers of