

Introduction

If you've ever suffered from back pain, you know just how much you want to outwit it. And if misery really does love company, you've got plenty. Back pain is a huge cause of temporary impairment in the United States:

- Each year, about 10% of the population of the United States suffers at least one episode of low back pain.
- 80% of adults will experience low back pain at some point during their lifetime.
- Up to 20% of working people experience back pain each year.
- Spinal diseases are *the most common cause of disability for adults under age 45*.
- At any given time, about 1% of the U.S. population is temporarily disabled because of back pain.
- Low back pain is the second leading cause of absenteeism at work in the U.S. and *results in more lost productivity than any other medical problem*.
- Low back problems are the most frequent reason for referral to orthopaedic surgeons, neurosurgeons, and physicians specializing in occupational medicine.
- 2.5 million patients see a doctor each year because of low back complaints.
- Low back pain is the leading Workmen's Compensation problem.
- Each year, low back complaints result in *\$15 billion in lost wages*.
- 17 million people are on either permanent or temporary disability because of low back problems.
- 10 million workers have functional limitations as a result of low back pain.

Outwitting Back Pain will teach you why you have developed low back pain and how you can try to get better. This book won't belittle you by suggesting your pain is

caused by tension or that it can be cured by following one specific set of exercises. Instead, *Outwitting Back Pain* will offer you a chance to understand the structure and function of the back, and, knowing that, you'll learn how the back can be injured. Then you'll find out how problems can be diagnosed; after that, you'll learn the methods of treatment.

This book will give you practical information that you can begin to use immediately, as well as the knowledge and confidence you need to speak effectively with doctors and other caregivers in the long term. Doctors love to use big words, and you're about to see that the vocabulary of Orthopaedics is replete with them. All of the important terms are in **boldface** so you can pinpoint them easily. I've tried to de-mystify them by defining them in lay language, so now you'll know some of medicine's secrets. For a quick reference, those terms are listed again in the Glossary at the end. I've found that I sometimes forget the meanings of obscure terms when I'm reading a book and then come across those terms in later chapters. As a result, in this book I've tried to give the lay synonym each time I use a term, so you won't have to hunt through previous chapters to find its meaning.

I've used many photographs of x-rays in this book because one picture is really worth a thousand words. Most of these x-rays came from my own personal collection. These x-ray films illustrate the various conditions I'll be describing, so to make them worthwhile, I've tried to make you X-ray Doctors-For-A-Day in one easy lesson by doing two things:

1. Accompanying each x-ray is a labeled outline drawing of that x-ray. That should make it much easier to understand exactly what the x-ray shows.

2. Below every x-ray is a box labeled “X-ray Vision.” You don’t need to read it in order to understand what the x-ray is showing. It contains more detailed information about the various things that can be seen on the x-ray, and is for readers who enjoy a detailed, technical explanation.

Back pain, as you’re about to see, isn’t just due to one condition. It occurs because of some kind of problem involving bones, joints, muscles, ligaments, discs, or nerves—or some combination of them. It’s time now to start learning about back pain, because the sooner you do, the sooner you can get better.

EXCERPT