



## WHY BACK PAIN BECOMES MORE PERSISTENT AFTER 50

*A Physical Therapist Explains What's Really Going On*

Most people think back pain is caused by “wear and tear.” That explanation is incomplete.

What we see clinically, especially in adults over 50, is a change in how the spine is supported, not just aging itself.

## WHAT CHANGES IN THE SPINE AS WE AGE

As we get older, three things commonly happen:

- 1). The deep muscles that stabilize the spine become less active**  
*These muscles don't weaken overnight – they slowly build up over time.*
- 2). Spinal joints lose tolerance to repeated stress**  
*This doesn't always show up on imaging, but it shows up in daily movement.*
- 3). The nervous system becomes more sensitive to certain positions**  
*Pain can persist even without a new injury.*

*This combination often leads to what clinicians call vertebrogenic low back pain – one of the most common diagnoses we see in adults over 50.*

# Why Rest Alone Doesn't Fix It



*Rest may reduce pain temporarily, but it doesn't restore:*

- Segmental spinal control
- Strength around the hips and trunk
- Movement confidence

Without addressing those factors, pain often returns – sometimes worse than before.

This is why many people tell us:

“It feels better for a bit... then it comes back.”

## **A SIMPLE SELF-CHECK**

If you notice any of the following, your pain may be more about movement control than damage:

- Difficulty standing up from a chair without using your hands
- Stiffness that improves slightly once you start moving
- Pain that worsens after sitting or standing too long

These patterns are extremely common in adults we see throughout the North Shore.

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# What Physical Therapy Focuses On



*In physical therapy, the goal is not just pain relief.*

*It's to:*

- *Restore how the spine is supported during daily movement*
- *Improve load tolerance of the joints*
- *Reduce unnecessary strain on sensitive tissues*

*This approach is supported by current musculoskeletal research and is especially effective for age-related back pain.*

## **WHY THIS MATTERS**

*Back pain is one of the leading reasons adults reduce activity as they age.*

*When movement decreases, strength and balance often follow — increasing the risk of future issues.*

*Understanding why pain is happening is often the first step toward preventing that cycle.*

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