

# BACK PAIN? WHAT TO EXPECT AT YOUR DOCTOR VISIT

Osteoarthritis (OA) and axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA) can both contribute to back pain, but each may affect you differently.

In addition to checking your symptoms, reviewing your family medical history and giving you a physical exam, here's what you can expect during your doctor visit if your doctor suspects your pain may be from axial spondyloarthritis or osteoarthritis.

## AXSPA



### If Your Doctor Suspects AxSpA

Your physical exam may include looking for signs of psoriasis, uveitis (eye inflammation), swelling in your fingers or toes, or asking you about any stomach or bowel problems that might suggest inflammatory bowel disease.

Imaging to identify signs of inflammation around joints and/or damage:

- **X-rays** of the spine and pelvis can show bone damage from ankylosing spondylitis, but nr-axSpA won't show up on X-rays.
- **MRI** can detect inflammation in the joints and small erosions from inflammation, including where the spine and pelvis connect — a hallmark of axSpA.
- **Computed tomography (CT)** is infrequently used to detect joint inflammation. It involves radiation exposure, so other imaging options are preferred.

**Blood tests** can detect inflammation in the blood, but inflammation may have many different causes, and not all people with axSpA test positive. Your doctor may also test for HLA-B27, a genetic marker associated with axSpA.

## OA



### If Your Doctor Suspects Osteoarthritis

During the physical exam, your doctor may look at and feel your back. You will also likely be asked to move in different ways to assess your range of motion.

Imaging to show damage to the bone and/or cartilage:

- **X-rays** are most commonly used for OA. They don't show cartilage, but they show narrowing in the space between bones as well as bone spurs, which point to OA.
- **MRI** isn't often used to diagnose OA, but it can show early damage that X-rays may miss.
- **Ultrasound, or sonography**, is occasionally used to detect changes in joint tissues that indicate OA.

There are no lab tests to diagnose OA, but in some cases, doctors use them to rule out other causes of your symptoms:

- **Blood tests** can rule out certain other conditions, such as axSpA.
- **Joint fluid analysis** can rule out conditions like infection.