

How to diagnose back pain in 5 minutes

Can it be done?

WEBINAR FOR GPs – 6 December 2022
8am – 8.30am



Dr Ralph Stanford

ORTHOPAEDIC SPINE SURGEON



- Spinal surgeon with over 20 years' experience.
- Dedicated to lifelong learning and sharing my expertise with others, I attend spinal conferences worldwide and regularly consult with colleagues about successful treatments.
- Conjoint Senior Lecturer at the University of New South Wales; Supervisor of Training for Orthopaedic Trainees, Prince of Wales Hospital; and Education Secretary for the Spine Society of Australia.
- Honorary Senior Scientist at Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA).

**If you have any questions about a patient, please feel free to call me on 02 9650 4893.
I will return your call and discuss how we can help.**

Introduction

1:1000
presentations in
primary care will
have a serious
diagnosis



Four groups

- Cancer (infection, inflammation)
- Nerve pain
- Deformities
- Non-specific pain

Cancer (infection)

We don't want to miss

Cancer (infection)

Have you had cancer (infection) before?

'Red flags' have low sensitivity

Be concerned

- New pain
- Persistent
- Unrelenting



Examination

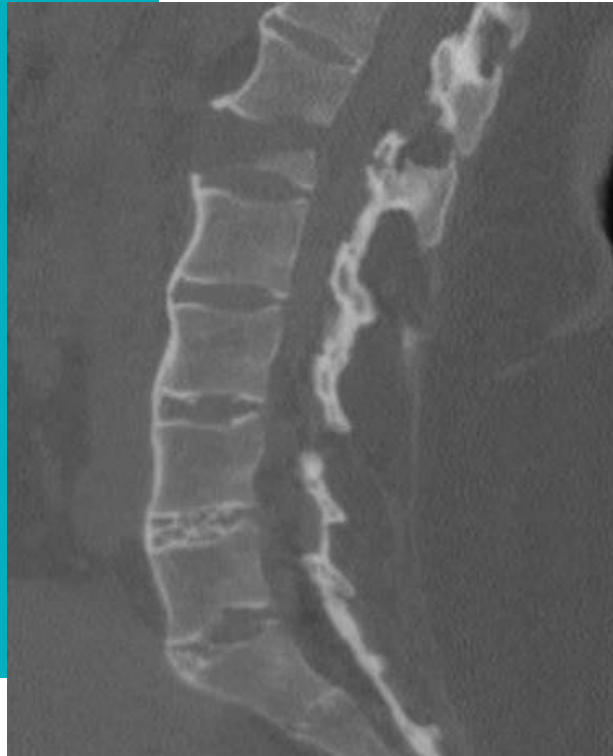
Usually unremarkable

May have spinal tenderness

May have neurological changes



Ankylosing spondylitis



Early morning stiffness = early phase

Stiff spine = late phase

Sudden pain in late phase = fracture

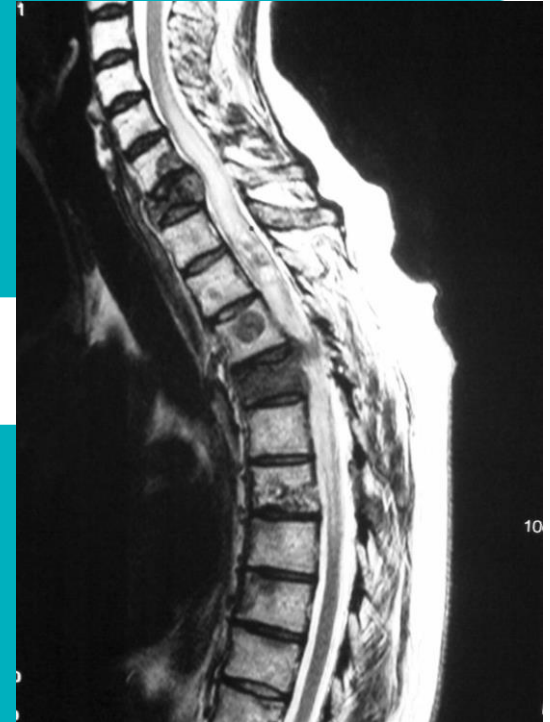
Investigations

MRI or CT

- Relevant part of spine

CRP for infection

Xray sacro-iliac joints for early ankylosing spondylitis



Nerve root pain

When is it serious?

Nerve root pain – when is it serious?



Significant (or progressive) weakness, grade 3/5 or worse

- Just anti-gravity

Difficulty passing urine (retention)

In a setting suggestive of cancer or infection

Investigation

MRI



Deformity

When to be concerned

Deformity

Most adult spinal deformities are benign

Be concerned:

- Side leaning or forward tilting
- Seems progressive
- Nerve pain

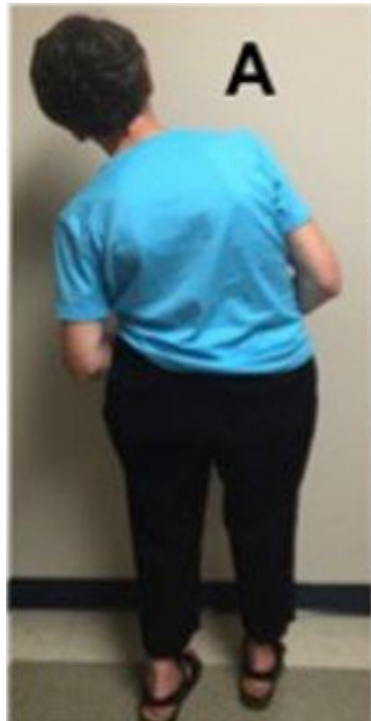
Refer for assessment and investigation

Do not rely on radiology reports

Spinal balance

Coronal plane

- Neck over gluteal cleft
- List to side
- Ribs may impact iliac crest



Sagittal plane

- Ear over hip
- Stooped
- Increases effort of walking



Non-specific pain

When should it be taken seriously?

Non-specific pain

Most people experience back pain and mostly it gets better

Some people develop chronic pain

- How to help them?

Mechanical

Comes and goes

Activity related

X-ray



Psychosocial



Anxiety and catastrophising

Non-physical forces drive loss of function

Need to pick early to enable intervention

STarT Back screening tool (Keele University)

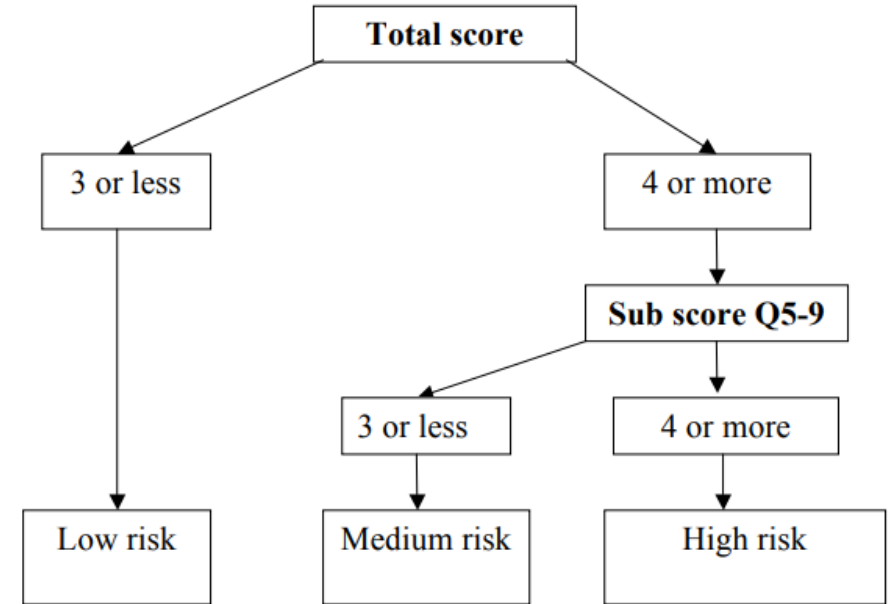
Thinking about the **last 2 weeks** tick your response to the following questions:

	Disagree 0	Agree 1
1 My back pain has spread down my leg(s) at some time in the last 2 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 I have had pain in the shoulder or neck at some time in the last 2 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 I have only walked short distances because of my back pain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 In the last 2 weeks, I have dressed more slowly than usual because of back pain	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 It's not really safe for a person with a condition like mine to be physically active	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Worrying thoughts have been going through my mind a lot of the time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 I feel that my back pain is terrible and it's never going to get any better	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 In general I have not enjoyed all the things I used to enjoy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Overall, how **bothersome** has your back pain been in the **last 2 weeks**?

Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very much	Extremely
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
0	0	0	1	1

Total score (all 9): _____ **Sub Score (Q5-9):** _____



How to find

STarT Back – Evidence Based
Implementation of Stratified Care
(keele.ac.uk)

Search 'Keele' + 'Start Back'

Summary

History of cancer or infection

Repeated clinical review

Trajectory of symptoms

Tools

- MRI/CT
- CRP
- X-ray
- STarT Back (Keele University)

Q & A

- A recording of the webinar will be available on my website
- See also my **article** online: Sinister Causes of Back Pain
- Further resources for GPs are available at <https://spinalsurgeonsydney.com.au/for-referrers>
- To receive future resources via email send your name and email address to info@powspine.com.au



As always if you have any questions about a patient, please feel free to call me on 02 9650 4893. I will return your call and discuss how we can help.

You can also reach me via ralphstanford@powspine.com.au.

