

MUSCLE STRAIN — SPINE & CORE

Lumbar (Low Back) Strain

Understanding your injury and getting back to full speed

WHAT IS IT?

The lumbar paraspinal muscles support and extend the low back. Acute lumbar strain is among the most common of all injuries — and one of the most recoverable: about 90% improve substantially within 6 weeks.

A **strain** means muscle fibers were overstretched. We grade strains I–III: **Grade I** — mild, microscopic fiber injury; **Grade II** — moderate, a partial tear with strength loss; **Grade III** — severe, complete disruption.

HOW IT HAPPENS

Lifting with the trunk flexed and rotated, a slip or unexpected load, shoveling, or deconditioned return to activity.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Low back pain and stiffness, worse with bending or straightening from a bend, muscle spasm, difficulty finding a comfortable position for the first days.

HOW LONG RECOVERY TAKES

- **Grade I:** a few days–2 weeks
- **Grade II:** 2–6 weeks
- **Grade III:** beyond 6 weeks, persistent pain deserves re-evaluation

TREATMENT

Almost all muscle strains heal without surgery. For the first 72 hours: relative rest, ice 15–20 minutes several times daily, compression, and *gentle* motion — complete rest slows healing. Then a progressive program: pain-free motion → isometrics → strengthening → **eccentric loading** (strengthening the muscle while it lengthens — the phase that prevents re-injury) → sport-specific work.

Staying active is the treatment: early walking, avoiding bed rest beyond a day, then core and hip-hinge strengthening. Bed rest slows recovery — the evidence on this is strong.

RETURNING TO SPORT

Return when strength is at least **90% of the other side**, motion is full and pain-free, and you can perform your sport's movements at full speed without hesitation. Returning before the muscle is re-strengthened is the main cause of re-injury.

PREVENTING THE NEXT ONE

Hip-hinge lifting mechanics, core conditioning, and graded return to loading after time off.

WHEN TO CALL US

Numbness in the saddle area, new bowel or bladder trouble, leg weakness, fever, night pain, or unexplained weight loss are red flags — call immediately.

CALL THE OFFICE RIGHT AWAY

Pain not controlled by medication, fever over 101.5°F, spreading redness or warmth, or new numbness or weakness. Direct office line (513) 441-5639; after hours (513) 354-3700.



SCAN FOR THE LATEST VERSION ONLINE

robertpettitmd.com/handouts/lumbar-strain.pdf

This handout is for general patient education and does not replace personalized medical advice. Always follow the specific instructions given by Dr. Pettit and your care team.