Red Flags for Potential Serious Conditions in Patients with Low Back Problems

Red Flags for the Low Back Region		
Condition	**Red Flag Data obtained during Interview/History**	**Red Flag Data obtained during Physical Exam**
Back related tumor[1,2]	Age over 50 History of cancer Unexplained weight loss Failure of conservative therapy Age over 50 of history of cancer or failure or conservative therapy	Ambiguous presentation in early stages. Constant pain not affected by position or activity; worse with weight-bearing, worse at night. Neurological signs in lower extremities
Back related infection (Spinal osteomyelitis)[3]	Recent infection (e.g., urinary tract or skin infection) Intravenous drug user/abuser Concurrent immunosuppressive disorder	Deep constant pain, increases with weight bearing; may radiate Fever, malaise, and swelling Spine rigidity; accessory mobility may be limited
Cauda equina syndrome[1,4]	Urine retention or incontinence Fecal incontinence Saddle anesthesia Global or progressive weakness in the lower extremities	Sensory deficits in the feet (L4, L5, S1 areas) Ankle dorsiflexion, toe extension, and ankle plantarflexion weakness
Spinal fracture[1,5]	History of trauma (including minor falls or heavy lifts for osteoporotic or elderly individuals) Prolonged use of steroids Age over 70 Loss of function or mobility	Point tenderness over site of fracture Exquisitely tender with palpation over fracture site Increased pain with weight-bearing Edema in local area
Abdominal aneurysm[6,7]	Back, abdominal, or groin pain Presence of peripheral vascular disease or coronary artery disease & associated risk factors (>50, Smoker, HTN, DM) Symptoms **not** related to movement stresses associated with somatic LBP	Abnormal width of aortic or iliac arterial pulses Presence of a bruit in the central epigastric area upon auscultation
Kidney disorders[8] pyelonephritis nephrolithiasis renal cell carcinoma	Unilateral flank or low back pain Difficulty with initiating urination, painful urination, or blood in the urine Recent of coexisting urinary tract infection Past episodes of kidney stone	Positive fist percussion test over the kidney

References:

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