

ASK THE DOC

Health plus, Today (Tuesday, 19 August 2008)

MUM'S CHRONIC BACK PAIN

QUESTION FROM CONCERNED

My 75-year-old mother is suffering from osteoporosis and has been taking Fosamax Plus since March this year. However, she keeps complaining that her back and spine are painful and uncomfortable when she sits, stands or walks for too long. She does light exercises every morning but they don't seem to lessen her back pain. Is there a more effective treatment for my mother besides the above medication? Or would you be able to recommend a specialist?

**ANSWER BY DR GABRIEL LIU,
CONSULTANT, UNIVERSITY SPINE CENTRE
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The description of your mother's condition suggests that she could be suffering from degenerative spine disease or osteoporotic compression fracture of the spine. Both conditions are not uncommon among elderly Singaporeans. Urgent medical attention is required when there is pain radiating from her spine to her legs, leg weakness or numbness, bowel and bladder dysfunction or an unsteady gait. A variety of treatments may be considered for her pain management: Postural control, avoidance of spinal positions that result in back pain, physiotherapy, Pilates (to strengthen the spinal muscles), simple analgesia or surgical intervention. However, it would be advisable to obtain further radiological information (for example, X-rays or an MRI scan) of your mother's spine in view of the chronic pain. I would recommend that your mother see a spine or orthopaedic surgeon for an assessment in order for an appropriate treatment plan.