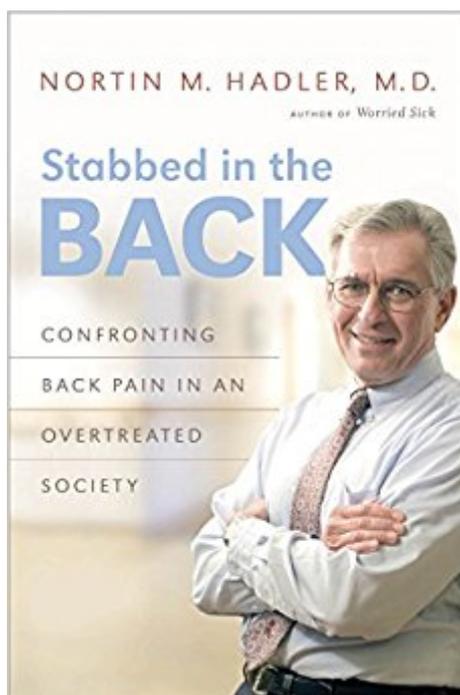


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# Stabbed In The Back: Confronting Back Pain In An Overtreated Society



## Synopsis

Norton Hadler knows backaches. For more than three decades as a physician and medical researcher, he has studied the experience of low back pain in people who are otherwise healthy. Hadler terms the low back pain that everyone suffers at one time or another "regional back pain." In this book, he addresses the history and treatment of the ailment with the healthy skepticism that has become his trademark, taking the "Hadlerian" approach to backaches and the backache treatment industry in order to separate the helpful from the hype. Basing his critique on an analysis of the most current medical literature as well as his clinical experience, Hadler argues that regional back pain is overly medicalized by doctors, surgeons, and alternative therapists who purvey various treatment regimens. Furthermore, he observes, the design of workers' compensation, disability insurance, and other "health" schemes actually thwarts getting well. For the past half century, says Hadler, back pain and back pain-related disability have exacted a huge toll, in terms of pain, suffering, and financial cost. *Stabbed in the Back* addresses this issue at multiple levels: as a human predicament, a profound social problem, a medical question, and a vexing public-policy challenge. Ultimately, Hadler's insights illustrate how the state of the science can and should inform the art and practice of medicine as well as public policy. *Stabbed in the Back* will arm any reader with the insights necessary to make informed decisions when confronting the next episode of low back pain.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Nobody's going to like Hadler's prescription for backache – neither patients, doctors nor the

government. But here it is from the UNC professor and health-care reformist author (Worried Sick: A Prescription for Health in an Overtreated America): get over it. The fact is that you may be best off if you do not tell anyone about your regional backache and try to get on with it, he declares. Hadler argues that no theory on what causes regional back pain has stood up to scientific testing, and the myriad of treatments do more to sustain an enormous treatment enterprise than ease the pain. Hadler presents an impressive survey of what doctors, chiropractors and surgeons now offer for back pain—and of the history and rationale for government disability programs. His conclusion is scornful. Predicaments of life such as back pain are not injuries, Hadler insists. [H]eadache, heartburn, sleeplessness, altered bowel habits, and many regional musculoskeletal disorders... do not respond to treatment as diseases because they are not diseases. That's what you call a bitter pill—but one that should trigger a much needed debate among health-care reformers. 5 illus. (Nov. 15) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

A bitter pill—but one that should trigger a much needed debate among health-care reformers.--Publishers Weekly  
"In this thought-provoking book, Hadler analyzes the evidentiary basis of the diagnosis and treatment of back pain with a fresh, no-nonsense razor.--Journal of the American Medical Association  
The volume is well organized, giving a good historical and clinical overview of back pain and of what Hadler terms 'the backache industry.'--Choice  
The next step [in health care reform] is the one Hadler is already confronting: how to really bring down costs as we move forward.--Progressive Pulse Blog  
Relentlessly probes the effectiveness of common medical treatments and finds them wanting. . . . [A] compelling book.--Library Journal

Hadler could have covered the information regarding the failure of back treatment in an essay. However, to turn it into a book he had to go way beyond back treatment. And, this included a long history of disability insurance since its onset by Bismarck in the 1880s. He also goes at length about technical differences between Social Security Disability Insurance vs Supplemental Security Income. The long last chapter is Hadler proposal to reform our entire health care system. That's all interesting stuff, but it is way beyond the subject of the book. Within his other excellent books such as *The Last Well Person: How to Stay Well Despite the Health-Care System* and *Worried Sick: A Prescription for Health in an Overtreated America* (H. Eugene and Lillian Youngs Lehman), Hadler takes on the entire medical establishment. Given his general subject, he is free to address a multitude of ailments (cancer, cardiovascular disease, obesity,

diabetes, etc...) and topics (insurance, hospital management, Medicare, doctor practices). Those mentioned books are invariably excellent. However, when Hadler wrote this book he forgot he was supposed to focus on back treatment, and instead mounted his customary broad-based attack on American health care. By doing so, he may exhaust the readers focused on back treatment. Nevertheless, if you can overcome this hurdle there is a lot to like in this book. According to Hadler, lower back issues are normal. He starts the book by stating: "To live a year without a backache is abnormal." And, he repeats this theme throughout the book. People with spine with many visual symptoms feel no pain. Others with near perfect spine are in chronic pain. Hadler expands on this conundrum in chapter 4. He shares surveys that convey that overall patients with back pain are no different than ones without as far as their spine structure is concerned. He states on page 40: "a person who displays a great deal of degenerative change is no more likely to have back pain than one who does not." He adds on page 105: "Regional back pain has little to do with ruptured discs... The specific causes of regional back pain continue to elude scientific inquiry. "Imaging technology is very profitable, but is no help in diagnosing. Hadler states on page 40: "imaging studies of the spine... are irrelevant at best..." He mentions, however, that such imaging is very profitable. And, so far no treatment has really proven effective. Thus, the less you do the better. Hadler chapter 6 on back surgery is scathing. None of it works, including fusing the spine, injecting into the disc, removing disc, and inserting artificial discs. He backs up his findings by referring to the Cochrane Collaboration, the Quebec Task Force on Spinal Disorders, the former Agency for Health Care Policy and Research. On page 124, he adds: "Even for prolonged low back pain, there is no science to support a surgical option." Interestingly, JFK was one patient who suffered through a botched back operation. Hadler feels that back surgery is a major case of Type II Error Medical Malpractice (doing something that is not necessary and potentially harmful). He feels like the American treatment of cardiovascular disease is another major case of Type II Error. Hadler considers that the main driver of how you will fare is how you enter the health care system. There are three options. The first one is you take care of it yourself with anti-inflammatory. The second one is you seek help from a doctor or chiropractor. The third option is you consider your chronic back ailment a work related injury and you seek indemnification through disability insurance. Those three channels will have very different typical outcomes. The person going at it alone will be fine. The patient visiting a doctor may spend a lot more on X-Rays, MRIs, etc... and eventually will be fine as long as they avoid surgery. The third one seeking indemnification is apparently condemned to a life long suffering caught in a system that gives incentives for not getting better. Hadler notes that Germany has way more chronic back ache sufferers associated with a far more generous disability insurance

system. Hadler advances that chronic back pain relates to job dissatisfaction. Apparently, Kafka developed his cynicism by working within the Workers' Accident Institute in Prague processing disability claims (pg. 130). Hadler indicates how the placebo effect can be stronger when associated with a physical intervention. He shows how they tested acupuncture vs a sham acupuncture procedure. And, acupuncture was no better than placebo. But, the placebo effect (sham acupuncture) was much stronger than when just giving a sugar pill (table 6. pg. 60). Hadler reviews the history of chiropractic medicine. He shows the result of the University of North Carolina Trial of Spinal Manipulation (fig 4. pg. 69). And, the latter indicates that spinal manipulation did reduce pain level faster for patients that had lower back pain for 2 - 4 weeks. However, as time passed the pain level between the test and control group converged. For patients with pain for 2 weeks or less, spinal manipulation had no effect relative to the control group. Also, Hadler is in disbelief how chiropractors believe that twisting the spine can cure asthma or diabetes. Those claims are of course absent of any scientific grounding.

This book is about three things: 1. Back pain - history, myths, beliefs and facts. 2. It's about those who treat back pain - history, myths, beliefs and facts. 3. It's also about how money can be separated from the patient and the system(s) that allow this to happen. I am a Physical Therapist assessing and treating people with back pain and I invariably advise them to always ask questions, take nothing for granted and to remember that all providers are biased one way or the other. In the end the great majority of patients can 'fix' themselves, we just point the way. Or as Nordin Hadler writes "provide wise counsel". An excellent book, it's not something that you can skim through though. It's packed full of information and logical argument that deserves to be read and re-read. It's probably not a book that will be recommended by Orthopaedic Surgeons or Chiropractors; which is more the reason for reading it.

best book on the back surgery scam you will ever read. if you have back problems please read this first before the doctor can destroy your life.

A must read if seeking treatment for back pain.

Learn the truth about spinal surgery. A must read for anyone with back problems. If you know Tiger Woods, get him to read it. It may not cure you, but it will protect you from quacks.

The author has obviously been treating back pain patients for some time and reads a LOT of research (as evidenced by all the studies quoted in the book). I don't recommend this book for patients, as it would probably be too "dry", rather its a must-read for people like myself who regularly treat back pain patients. Takes a good look at all the psychosocial aspects that combine to form a back pain patient. Pretty eye-opening at times.

This is a well documented expose of the failures of current concepts and therapy for axial back pain. The major portion of the work comes across as very negative with few if any positives. The major shortcoming is the failure to clearly deal with those instances where spinal disease does impact the spinal nerve roots resulting in sciatica or neurogenic claudication. On the whole it is insightful and should be required reading for all health care professionals and policy makers who deal with the back pain problem in our society. The question is, can the current culture of spinal over-treatment, be reversed?

The inimitable Dr Hadler tells it like it is. Somewhat technical but an easy read if you are medically inclined. A decent treatise on the need to be ultra conservative and avoid surgery unless 99% necessary.

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