

What Increases Your Risk for Back Pain?

Poor physical fitness. Aim to get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

Being overweight. Manage your weight by balancing your calories-in with your energy burned (physical activity). To lose about 1 pound per week, eliminate 500 calories per day through a combination of eating about 250 calories less (of high-calorie foods, drinks or fast food, for example) and taking a brisk walk for at least 30-60 minutes per day.

Inherited diseases or conditions. Back problems such as disc diseases can be inherited. And osteoporosis, or thinning of the bones, causes small fractures to the spine, which also cause pain. Get plenty of calcium-rich foods throughout your life.

How you work. Aside from lifting and sitting correctly, adjust your work space to minimize awkward movements and overreaching. If you stand for long periods, alternate resting each foot on a short stool if possible.

Care for Your Aching Back

Cold packs help reduce swelling and numb pain, while **heat packs** can reduce muscle spasms and pain.

If you think you've suffered back strain, apply cold treatment for 15 minutes, several times a day for two days. After 48 hours, a heating pad or warm bath may help.

To reduce swelling, take an anti-inflammatory pain reliever such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen or aspirin (unless your health care provider has advised against it).

If you have minor back pain, try to keep up your daily activities as pain allows and even exercise gently. Research has shown that moderate activity helps an aching back and is better than bed rest for putting you on the road to recovery.

If your back pain is chronic, lasting longer than three months, discuss your options with your health care provider.

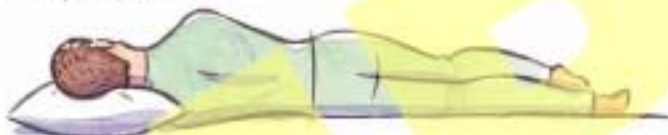


More Back Care Tips

Push, don't pull. When moving heavy objects, remember that pushing is easier on your back than pulling.

Prevent falls. Many back injuries result from slips, trips and falls. Watch out for loose carpeting and keep walk areas clear of electrical cords and other clutter.

Sleep smart. On a supportive, medium-firm mattress, sleep on your side with your knees bent so your back gets the rest it deserves. Avoid sleeping on your stomach.



Check your car seat. Adjust the seat forward so your knees are bent when pressing the pedals. Keep a pillow or rolled towel handy for extra back support, especially on long trips.

Stop smoking. It's the best thing you can do for your health. Smoker's cough can cause back pain. Talk to your health care provider about smoking cessation options that could work for you.

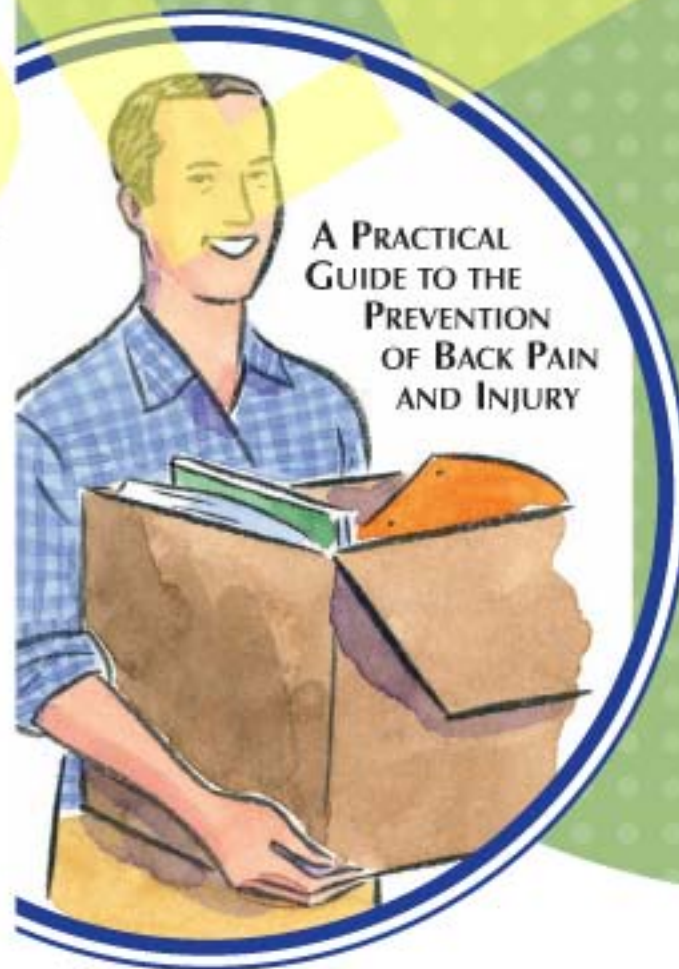
Listen to your body. If your back hurts, stop what you're doing. See your health care provider if:

- Pain has not eased after 72 hours of self-care, or the pain gets progressively worse.
- Pain radiates down an arm or leg.
- Pain involves weakness, tingling or numbness in one or both legs.
- Pain involves bladder or bowel problems.
- Pain is accompanied by fever, chills, sweating, loss of appetite, nausea or weight loss.
- You feel numbness in the groin or rectal area.

Final thought: Everyone is vulnerable to back injury. Since you can't avoid every activity that stresses your back, remember the precautions from this brochure and become more aware of how you move, lift, carry and hold your posture at work and at home to minimize pain and injury.

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How TO PROTECT YOUR BACK



A PRACTICAL
GUIDE TO THE
PREVENTION
OF BACK PAIN
AND INJURY

GOODBYE BACKACHE!

Most back pain is caused by muscle strain from poor posture, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, mental stress, improper lifting and lack of physical fitness. Your back works nonstop to support you while walking, sitting, playing and even when you're lying down. It's no wonder that back pain affects most people sooner or later. Fortunately, there are many ways you can "save" your back.



Are You Protecting Your Back?

Think about your back. Become more aware of how you are using or misusing it both on and off the job. Review your habits with the checklist below. Check the statements that apply to you.

- I avoid slouching when sitting or standing.
- I avoid leaning forward while working at my desk, washing dishes, etc.
- While sitting or driving for long periods, I use some type of lumbar cushion to support my lower back.
- When lifting heavy objects, I bend my knees and use the muscles in my legs, abdomen and shoulders more than my back.
- When moving an object, I let my leg muscles do the work by pushing, not pulling.
- I take steps to reduce stress and fatigue in my life.
- I include a regular stretching routine in my exercise program to build strength and flexibility in my spine.

The more you apply these practical safeguards, the less back strain you will experience. Read on for more tips.



Lift Smart

- **Think before you lift.** Never lift anything heavier than you can manage alone. Ask for help if the load is too heavy.
- **Bend your knees, not your waist.** Go down as low as you can by bending at your knees while keeping your back straight.
- **Turn to face the object** you are about to lift. Hold the load as close to your body as you can.
- **Lift with your legs.** Straighten up slowly using the strong muscles of your hips and legs. Balance the weight.



Did You Know?

Studies show people who often suppress their emotions or feel stressed can develop serious muscle tension in the back area; the muscles contract, pressing on nerves and causing pain. Become aware of your posture and mental stress. Take time for relaxation. Techniques such as deep breathing, gentle stretching and peaceful visualization can ease tension.

- **Move carefully.** Keep your back straight, and don't turn it sideways while carrying. Lift and unload slowly.
- **Use tools** and lifting machines whenever possible.

6 SUPER BACK SAVERS

1. **Sit with care.** Sitting all day is hard on the spine. Make sure your lower back gets the lumbar support it needs through a supportive chair or by adding a pillow or rolled towel.
2. **Get regular exercise.** Overall physical conditioning is a powerful factor in back health. Aerobic exercise, such as walking or swimming, three or four times a week can help you maintain a healthy and strong back. Also concentrate on strengthening the large muscles of your lower back and abdomen specifically.
3. **Trim your waistline.** The bigger your belly, the harder your back has to work to support it.

Try this exercise:

Lie on your back with your knees bent and both feet on the floor. With your arms lying at your sides, palms down, tighten your stomach and buttock muscles and slowly raise your hips into the air. Then slowly lower your hips to the floor. Work up to 20 repetitions.

4. **Take breaks from sitting.** Sitting for long periods, even an hour, increases spinal pressure. Vary your tasks, if possible, so you can stand up and walk around after about 20 minutes of sitting. At the very least, stand up and reach your hands over your head for a tall stretch.
5. **Get plenty of sleep.** Fatigue often underlies back strain and hinders good posture. Muscles need restorative sleep. Aim for 7-8 hours.

6. **Treat your feet.** Avoid wearing high heels, which are a major cause of back strain. Wear shoes that cushion you from hard surfaces and aid posture.

