



Back Health

Don't let your job be a pain in the back

Whether your job involves lifting and reaching or sitting at a desk for the majority of your working hours, the way you work can impact your risk for back pain.

For example, a job that involves moving boxes or other items can lead to soreness, discomfort, and injury if the wrong techniques are used. If your job primarily involves sitting, poor posture could strain your back.

To reduce your risk of injury, use the tips below.



When moving items ...

- Avoid movements that jolt or strain the back.
- If you need to turn, move your feet rather than twisting your body.
- Use equipment to move heavy objects, and follow job procedures that are designed to reduce the stress placed on your back.



When lifting ...

- Make sure your leg muscles do most of the work.
- Don't bend at the waist; bend at the knees and keep your back straight.
- Keep your head in line with your straight back.
- Keep the object you're lifting close to your body.



When you're seated ...

- Use a chair with good lumbar support. If you need more support, try placing a pillow or rolled up towel behind the small of the back.
- Avoid slouching.
- Don't cross your legs.
- To relieve muscle tension, get up and move or stretch every 30 to 60 minutes. ♦

Getting rid of the ache

A back problem can be a sharp pain that appears suddenly or a persistent dull ache that just won't go away. The way it's treated generally depends on how long the pain lasts.

Acute, or short-term, pain lasts for a few weeks and often gets better on its own. Pain relievers such as acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen can be helpful.

To relieve stiffness and ease pain, it also helps to limit bed rest and begin moving as soon as possible.



Treatment for chronic back pain, which lasts for longer than three months, ranges from hot and cold packs to physical therapy, medications, or surgery. A medical professional can help determine which options are best.

The back is complex, and it can be difficult to pinpoint the cause of pain. Always check with your doctor if severe pain persists or other symptoms appear, such as numbness, tingling, weakness, fever, or loss of bowel control. ♦

NEW

Your bulletin has a new look! Based on customer feedback, we have updated and enhanced this bulletin. We hope you enjoy the new look and features now included.



Physical factors contribute to back problems

The odds are that you'll experience back pain at some point in your life, as an achy back is one of the most common health-related complaints in the United States. From inactivity to age, a number of factors influence a person's chances of developing lower back pain.

While some physical conditions may be unavoidable, steps can be taken to support back health:

Fitness: When abdominal muscles are weak the spine is not properly supported, so a person who is not physically fit is more likely to experience back pain, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

Try this: To keep your back healthy, establish a daily exercise routine. Try low-impact aerobic exercise, such as walking. Swimming and yoga can also help. Exercises such as the plank, bridge, and crunch can strengthen your core muscles.

If you are experiencing back pain, check with your doctor to see which exercises are best for you.

Weight: Being overweight, or rapidly gaining a significant amount of weight, strains the back and can lead to lower back pain.

Try this: Regular exercise and a healthy diet can help with weight control.

Genetics: Some back problems, such as a type of arthritis, can be inherited.

Try this: Talk to a health care professional for advice.

Health concerns: Although rare, a serious condition such as kidney stones, a tumor, or an infection could cause back pain.

Try this: Check with your doctor to rule out these causes.

Age: The first twinges of back pain usually appear between the ages of 30 and 50, and it becomes more common as a person gets older. Loss of bone strength and reduced spine flexibility are two causes.

Try this: Stay active, maintain a healthy weight, eat a nutritious diet (that includes fruits, vegetables, and whole grains), and don't smoke. Smoking reduces the amount of blood flowing to the lower spine, contributing to the breakdown of spinal discs and increasing your risk for osteoporosis. ♦



Does bullying bring back pain?

The data says 'yes' — and that's not the only surprising cause

You might associate lower back pain with overdoing it on the weekend or lifting a heavy box the wrong way, but other factors could be the culprit.

Data from the National Health Interview Survey shows that more than movement can bring lower back pain. An analysis of that data published in the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics* found a number of stress-inducing risk factors for back pain:



Work-family imbalance: Having difficulty combining work with family responsibilities could lead to lack of exercise and unhealthy behaviors such as tobacco and alcohol use, as well as mental strain and muscle tension.



Job insecurity: Worrying about becoming unemployed and concerns about the future can bring anxiety. This can lead to a heightened focus on pain, and how bad it feels to us.



Toxic work environment: Being threatened, bullied, or harassed while on the job can affect the way person perceives pain. Harassment brings stress, which can lead to muscle tension and back pain.

When back problems emerge, discuss the issue with your doctor. If the workplace is a contributing factor, have a discussion with your supervisor and see if your workplace has an Employee Assistance Program that can help you cope with challenging work or personal issues. ♦

By the Numbers

About **4 out of 5** adults have lower back pain at some point in their life.

Costs associated with lower back pain exceed **\$100 billion** each year.

Sources: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*



Next Month's Topic:
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