

Take Care of Your Back

Your back is one of the strongest anatomical structures of your body. Despite this, about 80 per cent of the population will experience back pain at some stage in their lives. Several conditions influence your "back health." The cause of most back problems is poor posture, loss of flexibility, stressful living/working habits and above all, a general decline in physical fitness.

Proper spinal curves produce proper posture, which will result in comfort. A normal spine is shaped as a double S-curve with two curves to the front and one to the back. These curves balance each other so that the head is supported on a pillar.

Standing: Good posture when you are standing is straight vertical alignment of your body from the top of your head, through your body's centre to the bottom of your feet. If you have back pain from standing in one position for too long, try any of the following for relief:

- Walk around from time to time.
- Raise and rest one foot on a block about 15 or 20 cm (6 or 8 in.) high.
- Crouch periodically to relax your back.
- If you have been bending forward; stretch and bend backwards.
- Use an anti-fatigue mat.

Sitting: Sit straight and close to your work, don't slump forward. Your back should be supported by an appropriately placed lumbar support built into most chairs. Your knees should stick out two to three fingers width beyond the edge of the chair with your feet resting comfortably on the floor or footrest. If possible, get up regularly, and stretch or shift your sitting position at least once every 30 minutes.

Lifting: Get a firm footing, bend at the knees, hold the object close to you, tighten your stomach muscles, and use your leg muscles to support the weight. Avoid twisting while lifting; turn your body as one unit.

Did You Know...

Smoking increases your risk of disc and spine problems because it decreases the supply of blood and oxygen to the spine which may lead to degeneration of the spinal discs. If you smoke, quit!!

Lying Down: Sleep on a comfortable mattress with a small head pillow, or none at all. Try to sleep on your back with a pillow under your knees, or on your side with a pillow between your knees and your knees bent.

Healthy Diet: Excess weight places an unnecessary strain on the spine. The remedy includes developing good eating habits that provide you with enough nutrition without causing you to put on extra weight. Have your doctor or dietitian recommend a proper diet that suits your needs.

Exercise: Stay fit by exercising regularly to maintain a proper balance of flexibility, strength, and endurance. Walking, swimming and using exercise bikes are all excellent ways to strengthen your back muscles. Exercise is the only way to keep your muscles healthy. Exercise to:

- build strength and endurance for more efficient support and better posture
- stretch shortened muscles that are causing imbalances
- maintain mobility of joints

Stretch and loosen up before work.

Research has shown that trunk flexibility and mobility is significantly lower in the morning than later in the day, increasing the number and severity of back strains at this time. A few minutes of stretching can warm up cold stiff muscles and tendons and help you avoid an injury. Stretching relaxes your mind and tunes your body.

source: Sunrise Health Region, Take Care of Your Back Safety Talk, April 29, 2013

Safety Talk Discussion

Be Accountable: Choose safety - work safe - and go home injury free!