

Be Well Aware – Health Article



The Truth Behind What's Really Causing Your Back Pain

Lower Back Pain: The Facts

Did you know that lower back pain is the most common cause of job-related disability and is a leading contributor to missed workdays? In fact, over a quarter of adults reported experiencing lower back pain during the past 3 months, and 80% of adults experience lower back pain at some point in their lifetimes.

Pain can begin quickly as a result of an accident or by improperly lifting something heavy, or it can develop over time due to age-related changes of the spine. Sedentary lifestyles may also set the stage for lower back pain, especially when a weekday routine of getting too little exercise is paired with a strenuous weekend workout.

Risk Factors for Back Pain

- **Age.** Lower back pain becomes more common with age, and typically occurs between the ages of 30 and 40.
- **Fitness level.** Back pain is more common among those who are not physically fit, since weak back and abdominal muscles may not properly support the spine.
- **Diet.** A diet high in calories and fat combined with inactive lifestyle can lead to being overweight, which can add stress on the back.

- **Occupation.** Jobs requiring heavy lifting, pushing, or pulling can lead to injury and back pain. An inactive, sedentary job may also contribute to back pain, especially if you have poor posture or sit in an uncomfortable chair.

Your Core Muscles Can Help!

Your back muscles and abdominal muscles, also known as your “core muscles”, provide the strength needed to keep the body upright. When these core muscles are in poor condition, additional stress is applied to the spine as it supports the body, and back injury or pain is more likely to occur. Your core muscles also tend to weaken with age unless they are specifically exercised, which is why it's so important to include exercises for your lower back and abdominal muscles in your regular work out routine.



Keep Your Posture in Mind

Good posture is an important part of long-term health. Holding your body the right way, whether you are moving or still, can prevent pain, injuries, and other health problems. Staying mindful of your posture during everyday activities like walking, watching TV, or washing dishes, can go a long way in preventing back pain.

Here are a few more ways to improve your posture:

- **Stay active.** Specifically yoga, tai chi, or other classes that focus on body awareness.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Extra weight can weaken abdominal muscles as well as cause problems for your pelvis and spine, which can hurt your posture and lead to lower back pain.
- **Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.** High heels can throw off your balance and cause you to walk differently, hurting your posture and leading to lower back pain.
- **Make sure work surfaces are at a comfortable height,** whether you're at work in front of your computer, making dinner, or eating a meal.

Lift Safely

Improper lifting can also be the cause of lower back pain. Before you lift something heavy:

- Know what you're lifting and how you'll lift it.
- Be aware of the weight of the object.
- Determine whether it is safe to lift on your own.
- Make sure your work area is flat, dry, and clear of debris, and wear proper protective shoes.
- Choose **PUSHING** a load instead of **PULLING** whenever possible.

Prolonged Sitting and Standing

90% more pressure is put on your back when you sit versus when you stand. When you're sitting, make sure your feet touch the floor or are supported, keep your knees and hips level, sit up to help keep your spine straight, and look straight without neck strain.

When standing for long periods of time, it's important to take breaks. For every 25-30 minutes standing, try to sit for 1-2 minutes. If you must stand for a long time, rest one foot on a short support such as a small step or box.

Best Sleep Positions for Lower Back Pain



Sleep on your side with a pillow between your knees



Sleep on your side in the fetal position



Sleep on your stomach with a pillow under your abdomen

References:

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