

TOOLBOX TOPIC

BACK PAIN – PREVENTION TIPS



INTRODUCTION

BACK PAIN! It can stop you from being able to move, work and get a good night's sleep. Even the simplest of everyday tasks, like getting out of bed, can be unbearable.

When you've got back pain you may also feel irritable or short-tempered. You might worry that you're going to have this pain for the rest of your life and feel helpless to do anything about it.

It can feel like back pain is controlling your life. But, whether this is the first or the fiftieth time you've had back pain, there are many things you can do to get on top of it and lessen the chance of it happening again.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF BACK PAIN?

Back pain may be felt as a sharp pain, ache or spasm in the lower part of the back, or in the hips/buttocks. Your back may feel stiff, making it difficult to turn or bend. Sometimes pain can also travel down one or both of your legs. You may also notice tingling (pins and needles) or numbness in your legs and/or feet. Sciatica is pain, numbness and/or a tingling sensation felt along the sciatic nerve.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

There are many joints, muscles and other structures in the back that can cause pain. In most cases it is impossible to find one particular thing that is causing the pain. Often, it is due to a combination of different factors, such as:

- Poor posture
- Muscle weakness (back and abdominal muscles)
- Muscle strain or spasm
- Putting extra pressure on the spine, for example bending and twisting, by lifting something awkwardly or sitting for long periods
- Poor fitness or low physical activity levels
- Being overweight/obese.

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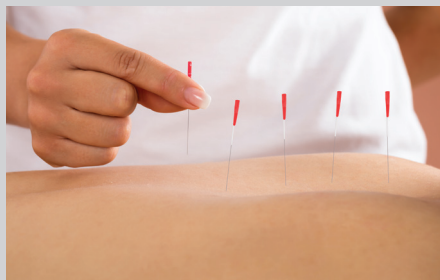
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WHEN SHOULD YOU SEE YOUR DOCTOR?

- If your pain does not settle down after a few weeks, or starts getting worse - after two months, nine out of 10 people will have recovered from back pain.
- Is severely affecting your ability to move, exercise, work or sleep.
- Is affecting your mood making you depressed, anxious or angry.
- Is causing you to take strong pain relieving medications for more than a few days.
- You have symptoms such as losing weight, tingling or numbness in the legs or feet, sweats and chills, problems controlling your bladder or bowel
- You have osteoporosis and you start getting back pain.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP WHEN YOU HAVE BACK PAIN?

- Arthritis Australia's Back pain booklet provides information to help you understand back pain, work with your healthcare team and choose treatments that are appropriate for you. The booklet is available at www.arthritisaustralia.com.au or by calling 1800 011 041.
- Learn ways to manage pain. There are many things you can try, including:
 - acupuncture: this has been shown to be helpful with longer-term back pain
 - massage: may be useful for short and long-term back pain, especially when combined with exercises and education
 - manipulation of the spine: this may be useful for some cases of longer-term back pain although further research is necessary to better understand the benefits
 - medicines: there are medicines that can help with back pain.
- Stay active. Your back is designed for movement. The sooner you get back to your normal activities the sooner you will recover from a bout of back pain. You may need to rest or reduce some activities when the pain is bad. But resting for more than a day or two usually does not help and may do more harm than good. See a physiotherapist or other health professional for advice about exercises to keep your back moving.



TOP 5 TIPS FOR PREVENTING BACK PAIN

Physiotherapist Brad Beer www.pogophysio.com.au/blog/author/brad-beer/

Optimise and manipulate your work environment

Analyse the demands of your work and understand the risks involved. Think about how you work, what's required of you and plan ahead.

Always warm up!

The most 'at risk' time for your low-back to sustain an injury is when you body and back are not warmed up and after prolonged sitting

Maintain optimal postures

Life is a series of postures. If you maintain poor postures repetitively, ie. Repetitive bending, lifting and twisting, you can expect a back pain to develop. Think about your posture and how you move.

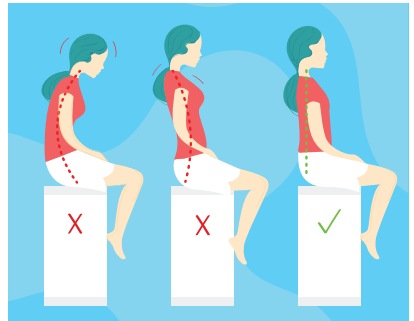
How?

- Make sure you have the right equipment and lifting gear with you if required. Assess the weight of something before you lift it on your own!
- Use your legs and bum to lift, don't use your back.
- Follow safe lifting techniques. Get help when required.
- Space out manual work where possible – variety is the spice of life and will help save your back! Don't spend an hour bent over doing a repetitive task where possible!
- Use levers and pulleys for lifting

A warm up helps get blood flowing and muscles warm and increases elasticity in tissues, therefore reducing the risk of over-stretching and straining low-back structures.

How?

- After a long drive to a worksite, especially in the morning it's super important you warm up your back!
- Don't lift heavy first up – start with lighter lifts and loads so as to make sure your back warms up and gets used to being used .
- Run through stretches when you first arrive at your worksite in the morning and do quick stretches after smoko and lunch breaks to maintain good back range – quads, hip flexor and gluts stretches.



How?

- Use your big muscles – your legs to help lift heavy objects, not your small back muscles.
- Maintain safe lifting postures – neutral spine is ideal.
- Don't slouch for hours driving in the car to the next job.
- Get a lumbar support for your car to help maintain neutral spine
- Don't slouch at home on the couch – it will only make your back tighter and more prone to injury
- Set your shoulder blades back when lifting and carrying heavy objects or drilling, hammering or doing other manual tasks
- Vary your postures and avoid lifting, pushing or pulling from a prolonged flexed position or while in a twisted posture.

TOP 5 TIPS FOR PREVENTING BACK PAIN - CONTINUED

Get strong and stay strong

Core and hip strengthening really is the key to both preventing and fixing pain. There are a number of ways and methods you can use to strengthen your back and honestly, it doesn't really matter which one you choose, as long as you enjoy doing it, do it regularly and get the strength you are after.

How?

- Use a local physiotherapist or personal trainer can help in teaching you how to use your core and hip muscles properly to support your back.
- Clinical pilates – it's not just for the ladies, guys – it is a very challenging way to work on building useful back and core strength and stability. Even guys who look good often realise through clinical pilates how much work needs to be done on their deep core back strength.
- Make sure you are engaging your deep abdominal muscles. I.e. Transverse abdominus and multifidus which help to co-contract to support you back together.
- Do functional exercises – while bench pressing huge weights may give you huge pecs and look good, it's not very functional. When do you ever lie down and lift 100kgs from flat on your back? Never. I recommend functional exercises involving legs, core and upper body together – these better help mimic your work activities.
- Don't train in the gym using benches or lying down – these exercises are non-functional as you don't sit down at work to lift things so why do it in the gym?



QUESTIONS / ANSWERS TO GENERATE DISCUSSION

Is there any equipment that you feel is contributing to back pain?

Would you be willing to start a pre stretch – warm up routine to reduce injuries?

Is there any other reasonably practical solutions for us to consider to reduce back pain?

References:

1. <https://www.arthritissa.org.au/>
2. <https://www.pogophysio.com.au/blog/author/brad-beer/>