

TIPS FOR SELF-CARE OF YOUR BACK

Back pain is rarely the result of one incident or injury. One of the keys to having a healthy back is understanding that most back injuries are the result of the cumulative effects of months or even years of poor posture, faulty body mechanics, stressful living and working habits, loss of flexibility and strength, and a general lack of physical fitness.

If you understand that things such as stooped posture, slumped sitting, improper lifting, twisting, weak abdominal muscles, tight hamstring muscles, emotional tension and even smoking are risk factors that can lead to a back problem, it becomes clear that changing some of these factors can help prevent back problems.

Almost all back disorders are the result of:

1. Poor posture
2. Faulty body mechanics
3. Stressful living and working habits
4. Loss of strength and flexibility
5. General decline of physical fitness

Taking the following precautions to protect your back and help prevent further episodes of back pain:

- Sit, walk and stand with a balanced, relaxed posture. Think tall, chest lifted, shoulders relaxed, chin tucked in and head level.
- Improve your footwear (avoid high heels).
- Take up Pilates: it both strengthens your core and improves your flexibility.
- Avoid sudden forceful movements.
- Bend and lift properly. Bend your knees. Take care not to twist when lifting. Avoid lifting heavy objects and avoid repetitive lifting.

- Sleeping – your mattress should be firm enough to support your natural shape.
- Driving – good support from your car seat will prevent back pain. If you need more support, use a lumbar roll.
- Lifting – wherever possible, use trolleys or other aides to lift and carry heavy or bulky items.
- Storage – store loads at waist height if you need to move them regularly.
- Choose chairs that give good support to prevent back pain. Use a lumbar roll when sitting to support your back.
- Maintain a healthy body-weight.
- Exercise regularly – flexibility and strengthening exercises are especially important. Consider attending gym or pilates classes.
- Avoid staying in the same position, especially sitting, for too long. Stand, stretch and walk a little every half hour.
- Give up smoking. It's linked to back pain so quitting may help reduce pain, and will also lower the risk of heart disease, cancer and other diseases.
- Go for a walk: it helps to relieve stress and improve your fitness.

