

HEALTH & WELLNEWS

WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

At a Glance.....



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A PAIN IN THE BACK



Back pain is not just a nuisance, it can seriously affect your daily activity and have an impact on your posture, your joints, sleeping habits and overall health.

How Your Back Works

Your spine serves two vital functions. It's structure allows you to stand upright, and it protects the spinal column which is the message pathway between your brain and all of the parts of your body. The spine is a complicated column of bones called vertebrae which are separated by cushioning disks. Strong ligaments hold the bones together, and muscles attached to the spine hold it upright.

Through the center of the spinal column runs the spinal cord, which is the information highway for the entire body. Bundles of spinal nerves emerge from between the vertebrae and extend throughout the body to the tips of the fingers and the ends of the toes. Your ability to walk, run, jump, lift and feel every sensation below your neck requires a healthy spine.

Common Causes of Back Pain

Eight out of ten Canadians will experience some degree of back pain at some point in their life. One of the reasons back pain is so common is that it has many different causes. Acute back pain, which comes on suddenly, often results from a specific occurrence such as an accident, a sports strain or injury, a fall or blow to the neck or back, improper lifting, gardening or shoveling.

Back pain can also arise from our habits, and often 'bad' habits, such as poor posture, non-supportive seating, improper computer stations, lack of exercise and unstable footwear.

Causes of back pain may also vary with our stage of life ie. pregnancy, children carrying overloaded backpacks, falls, age related disorders such as osteoarthritis, osteoporosis and rheumatoid arthritis. Abnormalities at birth, such as scoliosis, can also cause back pain.

A phenomenon known as 'referred pain' from an unrelated condition such as a bladder infection or an inflamed prostate can also create pain in the back.

Warning Signs of Potential Back Problems

Here are some symptoms that might indicate that you are suffering from a back problem that should be treated:

- ; leg pain with numbness, tingling and/or weakness
- ; back or leg pain when you cough, sneeze or strain
- ; difficulty standing up after sitting for any period of time
- ; pain in your hip, buttock, thigh, knee or foot
- ; unbalanced posture, when one shoulder is visibly higher than the other
- ; pain which prevents you from sleeping well
- ; pain that persists or worsens after 48 hours

Relieving Back Pain



Medication will work to relieve pain symptoms but medication will not cure the cause of the back pain. Drugs also have side effects which must be considered. For example, ASA and ibuprofen can cause stomach irritation and even ulcers. Talk to your health care provider about the benefits and risks of any medicine before you take it.



Within the first 48 hours after your back pain starts, you may want to apply a cold pack (a bag of frozen peas) to the painful area for five to ten minutes at a time to reduce inflammation and swelling in the injured area. You should use a barrier such as a towel to prevent injury to your skin. If symptoms last longer than 48 hours, you may find that a heating pad, hot shower or bath helps to relieve symptoms.

When pain is severe, you should avoid heavy lifting, lifting while twisting, bending, reaching and sitting for long periods of time.



Bed rest is often recommended for short periods for severe symptoms. However, bed rest should be limited to two or three days. Lying down for longer periods may weaken muscles and bones and actually slow recovery. Be sure you get up every two hours and walk around. Feeling a little discomfort as you return to normal activity is common and expected and does not mean you are hurting yourself.



Exercise is important to your overall health. It can help you lose body fat and decrease excess stress on the spine as well as strengthen and tone muscles to help support the spine. Try walking short distances, using a stationary bike and swimming - these things can be done without putting much stress on your back.

It is important that you start slowly and gradually build up the speed and length of time that you do the exercise.

Preventing Back Injury

Staying physically fit with regular exercise will help keep your muscles toned and your back strong. This alone can help prevent minor sprains and strains to your back. Always stretch before performing exercise, lifting or rigorous activity in order to prevent injury.

Tips to keep your back healthy include:

- ú wear comfortable , low-heeled shoes
- ú have your shoes fitted with supports customized to your feet to help distribute your weight evenly and assist with good posture
- ú make sure your work surface is at a comfortable height for you
- ú use a chair with good lower back support or purchase a backrest for your chair
- ú if you must sit or stand for long period of time, try resting one foot on a low stool
- ú if you must drive long distances, try using a pillow or rolled-up towel behind the small of your back. Also, be sure to stop often and walk around for a few minutes
- ú if you have trouble sleeping, try sleeping on your back with a pillow under your knees, or sleep on your side with your knees bent and a pillow between your knees. Consider purchasing a cervical pillow for your head to help keep your neck and spine in proper alignment while you sleep
- ú a support belt may also help

How Can I Prevent Injuring My Back While Lifting?



Lifting is the most common cause of fatigue and low back pain. Each year about 8000 Canadian workers are permanently disabled by back injuries. Many others are unable to return to the jobs they had before the injury. Preventing back injuries is much easier than correcting them. Here are some tips:

Before lifting a load:

- identify the weight of the load
- make sure you can lift the load without straining yourself
- make sure the load is free to move
- make sure that the path to where you will move the load is clear and the floor is clean

As you lift:

- stand close to the load, facing the direction you plan to move
- keep your feet well apart to gain balance
- make sure you have a good grip on the load
- tighten your stomach muscles
- tuck your chin into your chest
- start to lift using your body weight
- hold the load close to your body
- lift smoothly without jerking



OH, MY ACHING BACKPACK!!



Are you concerned about the weight of your children's backpacks as they stumble out the door on their way to school, swaying from the weight of the world on their backs!? A number of recent studies show more students are complaining of sore backs, shoulders, muscle strain, numbness and poor posture from carrying overloaded backpacks. All this occurring at an age when they are experiencing rapid physical growth, motor and spinal development. **Experts state that children should not be carrying more than 10% of their body weight.** Is your child complaining of backaches and pains by Friday but seems much improved by the end of the weekend? Could be that overloaded backpack! Tell children to wear both shoulder straps over their shoulders - this will help prevent leaning to one side which could curve the spine over time. Load the heaviest items first so it is closest to the child's back making it easier to carry the weight. Adjust shoulder straps so the pack fits close to the upper part of the body - the further a pack is away from the body, the more difficult it is to achieve proper balance and walk upright.

HECTIC LIFESTYLES AND NUTRITION

The Facts:

- *We are getting busier and living at a faster pace every year - being rushed means we may not always eat as well as we should
- *Skipping meals, eating erratically and being stressed can lower your resistance to colds and flu
- *18% of Canadians eat nothing for breakfast except maybe tea or coffee....that's like expecting your car to run without gas and oil



The Fix:

- *Choose healthy convenience foods such as pre-made salads, canned beans, bean spreads (hummus) and cooked chicken
- *Try healthier snacks like yogurt, fresh fruit, dried fruit, veggie pizza, vegetable juices, cereal straight from the box, milk (including low fat chocolate milk) and crackers with peanut butter or cheese
- *When eating out, choose the healthier items such as baked potatoes with chili, grilled chicken burgers, grilled chicken salads, fruit plates, pizza and milk, juice or water instead of pop or coffee
- *A lack of iron can cause you to feel tired. The best source of iron is lean red meat, however, you can obtain iron from enriched cereals, beans, peas, dried fruit and dark leafy vegetables. Iron rich foods are best eaten with vitamin C rich foods as vitamin C helps iron to be absorbed - try orange juice, strawberries and kiwis.
- *Keep well hydrated. Being dehydrated can make you feel irritable and tired. Try herbal tea, water, unsweetened juice and broth type soups.

Sources for Resources:

www.medbroadcast.com

www.canadian-health-network.ca

MDM Insurance Services Inc.

For additional copies please contact MDM administration at 1-800-838-1531.

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