

Hope & Healing

Backache How to Conquer Backache

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction _____

About 8 of 10 Americans will have acute back pain sometime in their adult life. And, most of the time the exact cause will not be known, but recovery will occur.

A wide variety of back problems are loosely termed back strain or sprain. The term sprain is generally used when a ligament is partially torn, and strain when a muscle is overstretched. Neither x-rays nor a physical exam will help tell the difference. In fact, the difference is not important. Treatment is the same and the expectations of recovery are about the same.

Two other conditions, muscle spasms and ruptured discs, are more clearly defined.

Muscle Spasms _____

Muscle spasms are painful muscle contractions that begin suddenly, and are most often caused by an injury. They can be caused or aggravated by poor posture, sitting for long periods in the same position, tense back muscles, weak abdominal muscles, and emotional stress.

Disc Problems _____

Problem discs are called "slipped discs," but the discs don't actually slip out of their positions between the vertebral bones. Discs act as shock absorbers and are subject to wear and tear that thins their coverings, permitting the material inside to rupture to the outside. If this material — known as

nucleus pulposus — pinches a spinal nerve, it will cause pain or numbness in the back, in an arm, or in a leg, depending on whether the damaged disc is located in the neck, mid-back, or low back.

Other causes of back pain can arise outside the spine from kidney disease, cancer, arthritis, osteoporosis (bone softness) and spinal infections.

These are not common causes and usually there will be symptoms other than back pain to help identify the cause. Additionally, back pain will sometimes accompany abnormal curvature of the spine.

Making the Diagnosis _____

Routine x-rays of the back for acute back pain rarely help to identify the cause, and they rarely show one of the causes listed above. Computerized diagnostic systems such as CAT and MRI scans are much more precise in their ability to identify a ruptured disc or other cause. A myelogram, where dye is injected into the spinal canal, is used when the problem persists and the diagnosis is a puzzle and surgery may help correct it.

If Back Pain Strikes, Here's What To Do _____

- Apply an ice pack for 10-20 minutes every two hours for two days (never put ice directly on bare skin). After two days you can continue to use ice packs or switch to a heating pad, whichever makes you feel better.
- Stay in bed from two to seven days.

Staying in bed longer may weaken your muscles and delay your complete recovery.

- Take aspirin or Ibuprofen every four to six hours to relieve pain and inflammation. Usually these preparations will control the pain. Only rarely will prescription pain killers be required.
- Stay active during recovery. Moderate activity will actually help your back even though it hurts to move around. Do stretching exercises daily to stay limber.

When to See Your Doctor _____

Call for an appointment right away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Pain, numbness, or tingling down an arm or leg.
- Back pain that continues to hurt after two days of bed rest.
- Back pain after an accidental fall or car wreck.
- Back pain with fever, or bladder or bowel problems.
- Backache in an older person or a child.
- If your back improves, but then gets worse. As you improve, become more active gradually. Avoid sports and lifting for at least two weeks after the pain is gone.

Protecting Your Back So That it Doesn't Happen Again _____

Most of the changes you need to make to prevent back problems are common sense. Your back didn't go out all at once; it took years of too little exercise and too much sitting. So, exercise is crucial.

Four Simple Exercises To Keep Your Back Healthy and Limber ____

Studies show that stretching exercises are very effective in preventing back pains.

The Half Sit-up This exercise strengthens your abdominal muscles. Lie on your back with your knees bent, your feet on the floor, and your arms at your sides. Begin the exercise by raising your head until your shoulder blades are off the floor. Touch your hands to your knees. Hold for five seconds and slowly lie back. Repeat five times.

The Wall Slide This exercise will strengthen your front thigh muscles. Stand with your back to a wall with your feet as wide as your shoulders and with your heels 18 inches from the wall. Do the exercise by sliding to a half-sit, with your back braced against the wall. Hold for 5 seconds and slide back up. Repeat 5 times.

From Stomach to Elbows This exercise will strengthen the muscles and ligaments on the front of your spine. Position yourself flat on your stomach with your hands crossed under your face and with your elbows at the level of your shoulder. Then, prop up on your elbows. At first you will be able to hold this position for only 5 to 10 seconds. Do it five times. Each day hold the position longer until you're holding for 1 to 2 minutes each time.

Pelvic Tilt This exercise strengthens your abdominal muscles and stretches your back muscles. Position yourself by

standing with your back to a wall with your heels five to six inches from the wall. Tighten your stomach and buttock muscles and tilt your pelvis so that your back is flat against the wall. Hold for 5 seconds. Relax. Repeat 5 times.

Other Back Protectors _____

1. When standing in one place for a long time, place one foot on a small stool.
2. When sitting for long periods, place a small pillow to your back and get up to walk around every half hour or so.
3. For long car, airplane or train travel, use an air cushion to absorb the vibrations of movement. Take frequent breaks if driving or get up and walk the aisle if on a train or plane.
4. Keep your weight down.
5. Stop smoking. Smoking reduces the flow of healing agents to the back.

Summary _____

Your life need not be turned upside down because of back problems. You must, however, do your part to keep a healthy back. This means becoming involved in an exercise program, controlling your weight, and stopping smoking, if you smoke.

You will not usually need special shoes or a special bed, nor will you need to be careful of every move you make for the rest of your life. Not if you do your part.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of Divine Power

The Bible teaches us that God is everywhere and available at all times. During crises our hearts cry out for help. The cry of the heart is heard as prayer by God. Prayer opens the door of the soul so that divine power may work its will and bring us harmony and peace.

Our crisis may be a heart attack or other serious sickness, for example. Sickness is really a malady that involves the soul. Modern medicines will help, of course, for they are also miracles of divine power. But, more fundamental, we must bring our souls to God for healing through prayer and meditation. By changing our outer behavior we bring body, mind, and soul into complete harmony.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.