



ToYourHealth

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

A Pain in the Back

Preventing & Treating Low Back Pain



Warmer spring weather lures you outside for heavy yard work, now is a good time to learn about how to prevent and treat low back pain. Four out of every five people have had low back pain at one time or another. With symptoms ranging from a dull ache to absolute agony, low back pain can put your life on hold. In fact, it's second only to the common cold in causing missed work days for adults under age 45.

Most low back pain clears up in a few days or weeks with a combination of rest, appropriate exercise, and over-the-counter pain medicines. But pain that persists for more than three months-chronic back pain-is more difficult to treat, in part because there are many different possible causes.

The lower, or lumbar, spine is a complex structure made up of powerful muscles, ligaments, bones, and joints. It provides the strength for standing, walking,

lifting and other activities, and allows the body to turn, twist, and bend.

What Causes Back Pain?

Back pain can be caused by a number of things, from sports injuries and other damage to simple wear and tear. If muscles are poorly conditioned or overworked, they are more easily strained. Someone who works all week at a desk, for example, can strain their back muscles doing heavy yard work on the weekend. Likewise, if the ligaments that help stabilize the low back are weak from inactivity or stiff from overuse, a sudden wrenching movement can cause a ligament sprain.

Aging can also bring low back pain. Bones lose strength over time. In someone with osteoporosis, the bones of the lumbar vertebrae can break or compress in a fall or even during some everyday activities. Arthritis can inflame joints, causing pain and

Next Page
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Continued from previous page

stiffness. And “slipped disks,” in which the rubbery cartilage between disks bulge outward, can press against the spinal nerves to cause pain.

How To Keep Your Back Healthy

Keeping your back healthy is the best way to prevent low back injury. There are several practical things you can do:

- **Don't try to lift objects too heavy for you.** Lift by bending your knees, not your back; keep your back straight and your head down and in line with your back. Keep the object close to your body, and don't twist when lifting.
- **Regular, low-impact exercises like walking, swimming, or stationary bike riding 30 minutes a day can increase muscle strength and flexibility.** Yoga can also help stretch and strengthen muscles and improve posture. Always stretch before exercise or other strenuous physical activity to prevent back injury.
- **Try to practice good posture.** Your back supports your weight most easily when it is straight. Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes. When standing, keep your weight balanced on both feet. Keep your shoulders back and don't slouch.
- **When sitting, try to use a chair with good lower back support.** A pillow or rolled-up towel placed behind the small of your back might help. Make sure your work surfaces, like your keyboard, are at a comfortable height. If you have to sit for a long period of time, rest your feet on a low stool or a stack of books. Switch sitting positions often, and walk around the office and gently stretch your muscles every so often to relieve tension.
- **Sleeping on a firm surface on your side helps your back.**
- **Eat a healthy diet with enough calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin D to help promote new bone growth.**
- **Keep extra weight off your waistline, where it can strain your lower back.**
- **If you smoke, quit; smoking reduces blood flow to the lower spine and causes the spinal discs to degenerate.**

