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**A PATIENTS GUIDE TO:
PREVENTING THE ONSET OF
LOW BACK PAIN**

Simple Ways to Prevent the Onset of Low Back Pain

- Engage in regular fitness activity. If you are sedentary, you may want to check with your physician if you have any health problems or are over the age of forty. Also, you may want to consult with a physical therapist for injury-prevention education and with a personal trainer for instruction in proper use of the equipment at the gym.
- If you sit for long periods of time, interrupt your sitting regularly to get up and move around. If your work requires a lot of sitting, space out such activities as filing, faxing, or running short errands through the office periodically through the day.
- Consider taking a walk on your lunch break. Be certain you have a good sitting position at work or in your car. Your knees should not be higher than your hips and make a habit of keeping your hips toward the back of the chair. This prevents slouching. Consider the use of a lumbar roll to keep a good sitting posture.
- If you have access to an ergonomist or an ergonomic evaluation at your work site, take advantage of any recommendations they may have.
- If you are gardening or performing any other activity that requires prolonged or repeated bending at the waist, straighten your back often and walk around. Intermittently perform a standing backward bending activity (place hands in the small of your back and bend backwards 5-10 times). This offsets the constant pressure in the back caused by bending forward and takes less than a minute to do every twenty to thirty minutes.
- When lifting an object from the ground:
 - Get as close as possible to the object.
 - Bend your knees while you maintain a hollow in your back, keeping your back erect as you squat.
 - Straighten the knees, not the back, as you lift the object upward.
 - Pivot your feet and do not twist the back as you move the object to another location.
 - As you lower the object to the ground or other surface, get as close as you can to the surface onto which the object is to be placed.
 - Bend your knees and squat as you lower the object, while maintaining the hollow in your back.
 - After physical activity, avoid slouched postures immediately following the activity as your body cools down. Often, this is the time low back pain develops, not during the physical activity itself.

Back Pain Prevention: 4 Harmful Habits

We all have bad habits some of the time. But now is a good time to fix the bad habits that can be harmful to your spine and cause back pain. Here are the top 5 bad habits that can be harmful to your spine:

#1 - Twisting when Lifting

So many people make this mistake! We forget to check our body mechanics while lifting, yet too much of this type of movement can be very damaging to your back. When lifting, follow these steps:



Wrong!

- Get close to the object
- Bend your knees and grasp the object firmly
- Lift straight up (*don't twist!*) in one fluid motion
- Hold the object close to your body
- Move close to where you want to place the object
- Bend your knees when lowering the object



#2 - Bad Posture

How often do you think about your posture? If you're like most people, not often enough.

But bad posture - slouched shoulders, head down, knees locked - places an enormous amount of stress on the spine.

Good posture keeps your body in balance and helps avoid that stress. Here's what good posture looks like when standing:

- Feet slightly apart
- Knees straight
- Chin slightly tucked in
- Shoulders back

Be sure to check and correct your posture during your everyday activities.

Soon you will find that you are actually *more* comfortable when your spine is in balance!

Stand tall!

#3 - Too Little Exercise, Too Much Weight



Exercise can be fun!

A sedentary lifestyle has become all too common in our society today. Eventually our spines will pay the price. In fact, research shows that people who do not exercise regularly and are overweight are more likely to suffer from back injuries and pain. To keep that from happening to you, get up and get moving! Find a way to put exercise into your daily activities. Not only will it help keep your spine healthy, it will help you to shed those unwanted pounds and feel great too!

#4- Smoking Tobacco



Among the many harmful effects of cigarette smoking on the body, early and more severe degeneration of the back is getting more and more attention. Nicotine - *in any form* - blocks the transport of oxygen and important nutrients to the spine's discs. Starved of oxygen, the discs are much less able to repair themselves and tend to collapse at a much earlier age than is seen in non-smokers. This painful collapse - [degenerative disc disease](#) - can lead to chronic back pain. Moreover, should any surgery be needed, smokers have been found to have much slower healing times and a high rate of failure to heal.

Use Good Body Mechanics to Help Keep Your Spine Safe

Taking care of your back is a life long project. With the prevalence of back pain an alarming 60% among U.S. adults, preventive measures are needed. The use of proper body mechanics is an effective way to prevent further injury to your back. When incorporated into activities of daily living, body mechanics help decrease the amount of stress on the spine. Education in body mechanics is therefore, essential in preventing the occurrence of back pain.

The goal of body mechanics is to learn how to move the body so as to prevent further injury to the spine. Awareness of common mistakes and proper principles can only help to achieve this goal. One such principle concerns posture.

Poor posture is one of the main causes of neck and back injuries. Forward head position and rounded shoulders contribute to poor posture. Any desk or computer employee has probably been guilty of poor posture at some point in their career and can attest to the fact that it's a hard habit to break. Fortunately, there are a few simple exercises that can help.

The chin tuck or, cervical retraction, involves sitting or standing erect while gently pulling your chin back to a comfortable position. Think of a turtle bringing his head back into his shell. This exercise should be performed in sets of ten, starting with one set and working up to two or three sets, several times daily. Shoulder squeezes or, scapular retractions, can also help improve posture. Shoulder squeezes involve bringing your elbows behind you while squeezing your shoulder blades together. This exercise should be performed ten to twenty times while holding the squeeze for a count of five. This motion increases mobility in your neck and back, making it easier to stand erect. Both of these exercises should be performed pain free. If pain does occur, try decreasing both the number of sets and the frequency. If pain persists, stop the exercise and consult your physician.

Compliance towards the exercises required to maintain or improve posture will lead to proper spine alignment. This in turn, will help decrease the intensity and frequency of painful flare-ups. Slumped sitting or standing represents faulty body mechanics, and, although it is a common mistake, it must be improved upon. If both the head and shoulders remain erect and balanced throughout the day, regardless of the activity being performed, then the chance of future back pain has lessened.

Body mechanics refers to the way we move our body. Posture is an important component in body mechanics. Good posture generally means the spine is in a 'neutral' or 'resting' position. The four normal curves of the spine are natural. This position is not static (fixed) and is individual. A neutral spine is one in which the position is comfortably maintained by the discs, bones, and ligaments.

Lateral (Side) Spinal Column



The four curves of the spine are Cervical Lordosis, Thoracic Kyphosis, Lumbar Lordosis and Sacral Kyphosis. The purpose of this information is to help you minimize injury to your spine. To do this you need to be proactive and learn some basic 'preventive' body activities.

A Complex Structure

As we age our spines change. Associated with aging are normal degenerative processes that can affect the vertebrae, facet joints and discs. Trauma, wear and tear, disease and poor body mechanics can alter the structural integrity of the spine.

Your spine is a complex arrangement of bones, joints, muscles, ligaments, discs, a spinal cord and nerves. In a healthy spine the vertebrae, facet joints and discs are vertically stacked, held together by a system of ligaments that help support the alignment while allowing movement within a safe range.