Avoid the agony: How to prevent nagging back pain

Published Jul. 10, 2017
Tags:

- [Bone Muscle & Joint Health](#)
- [Joint Health](#)

Share this:

Stretch and strengthen to prevent injury

Hunching over your garden to pull weeds or spending a summer day cleaning out your garage can be hard on your back if you don't do it on a regular basis. The same goes for falling into the "weekend warrior" trap at the gym—exercising strenuously but only on the weekends can cause back pain.

"Just about anyone can experience back pain, but there are a number of triggers like your level of fitness, your age, how much you weigh, your job and whether an issue runs in the family," explained Dr. Dirk Alander, Geisinger orthopaedic spine surgeon.

Whether it's a dull, constant ache or a sharp spike of pain, when you have back pain it can make getting through the day difficult. Back pain is the most common pain that adults face—likely because there are so many ways you can hurt it during your day.

Strengthen your back
If you find yourself bending at the hips frequently, you might start to feel aching in your lower back. While moving around might not feel good, stretching and strengthening your back can help to eliminate that pain. Here are some exercises that will help.

- Press-up back extensions: Lie on your stomach. Place your hands under your shoulders and press up. Put your elbows on the floor and hold this pose for several seconds.

- Wall sits: Stand about a foot from a wall and slide down until your lower back and bottom are flat against the wall and your knees are slightly bent.
- Crunches: Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor and place your hands behind your head, raise your shoulders off the floor and tighten your abs.

Maintain a healthy weight
Carrying extra weight can put a strain on the joints throughout your body. It can also strain your back.

"If you are overweight and the weight is concentrated through your midsection or belly, this can contribute to lower back pain," said Dr. Alander. "Exercise can not only help you lose some weight, it can also help your back to feel strong."

Improve your posture
Most people don't have the best posture. If you don't sit with your shoulders back and your spine straight, you could start feeling pain in your back. To check out your own posture, stand against a wall with your heels, calves, buttocks, shoulders and head all touching it. Take a step or two forward—if your posture has changed, you should correct it.

A chair that promotes good posture can also help you stay free from back pain. The chair back should be angled at about 10 degrees and support your lower back. The bottom of the chair should comfortably support your hips and thighs—but it shouldn't touch the back of your calves.

Watch how you sleep
Sleeping in a different position than you're used to can cause sudden back pain. So can sleeping on an old mattress, spending the night on the couch or on an uncomfortable sofa bed. If you're suffering from lower back pain, try sleeping on your back with a pillow under your lower legs.

If you're a side sleeper, position a pillow between your knees to keep your spine straight.

Learn how to lift properly

Picking up your kids, reaching for groceries in your car or helping a friend move some furniture can also cause back pain if you don't lift properly. Rather than bending at your hips to pick up something, it's safer to squat down and lift with your legs. Finally, know when to get help.

"Knowing your limits can help you prevent a serious back injury," said Dr. Alander.

Dirk Alander, MD, is a Geisinger orthopaedic surgeon specializing in spine surgery and spinal cord rehabilitation. He sees patients at 1175 East Mountain Blvd., Wilkes-Barre, and Geisinger Medical Center, Danville. To make an appointment with Dr. Alander or another Geisinger orthopaedic specialist, call 570-275-6401 or visit Geisinger.org.