

SHARE THE WELLNESS TIP



March 20, 2015

Oh, My Aching Back

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People experience two types of back pain: acute and chronic. Acute pain, which lasts a few days to a few weeks, is often due to an accident or injury, such as a fall. You may feel a muscle ache, shooting or stabbing pain, decreased range of motion or difficulty standing up straight. With chronic pain, you may not know the cause. It often gets worse over time and lasts for more than three months. You may experience areas of tenderness and stiffness.

More than Medication

When it comes to treating low back pain, there are many different options:

- ✿ Exercise – Many people assume lots of rest will help their pain improve. Research shows the opposite is true. Bed rest can actually make back pain worse. Exercise strengthens muscles that support your back and improve recovery. Physical therapy, yoga, abdominal exercises, stretching, swimming, walking, and other activities can reduce pain and help you feel better.
- ✿ Hot and Cold Packs – Ice, cold packs or even bags of frozen vegetables can numb pain and alleviate swelling. Apply them to sore areas for up to 20 minutes several times a day. Cold works best soon after pain begins. After two or three days, switch to heat to relax tight muscles and improve blood flow. Heating lamps, hot pads or warm baths all produce this effect. Avoid falling asleep with a heating pad to prevent burns.
- ✿ Over-the-counter Medications – Pills you can buy off the drugstore shelf, such as ibuprofen and naproxen, can reduce pain, swelling and inflammation. Or, try topical analgesics containing salicylates. You can rub these creams, ointments or gels on the skin directly over your painful muscles to ease pain and increase blood flow. Counter-irritants – sprays or creams that stimulate nerve endings – provoke feelings of warmth or cold that dull pain sensations. Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of using medications to treat your pain.
- ✿ Dollies and Carts – Whether you're gardening or moving, these tools can help you transport heavy loads without strain on your back. Two- or four-wheeled versions offer more stability than a wheelbarrow. If you must lift a heavy bag or box, use your leg muscles rather than your back. And always warm up with light movement and stretches first, as you would with any other type of physical activity.
- ✿ Sensible Shoes – Not all back pain starts in your spine. Pain and discomfort in your feet can change the way you walk, stretching the muscles and ligaments in your back past their normal range. Proper footwear can reduce this risk and keep your spine in alignment. Choose flats, or if you must wear heels, keep them under an inch high.
- ✿ Back Belts – Some studies suggest wearing wide elastic belts prevent back injury in people who move or lift heavy objects for a living, while others find no effect. In theory, these belts tighten around back and abdominal muscles, easing low back pain. Though their use remains controversial, proper ergonomics are important for workers in these fields.
- ✿ Pillows and Mattresses – Having the right pillow under your head at night can help you sleep and wake up pain-free. You may also find putting a pillow between your knees – especially if you sleep on your side or your back – brings relief. Also, choose a firm mattress rather than a soft one.

Getting Back on Your Feet

Low back pain is common, but you don't have to suffer. Discuss with your doctor which treatments may work best for you. It may take some time to find the best approach for your pain, but the relief you experience will be well worth the effort.