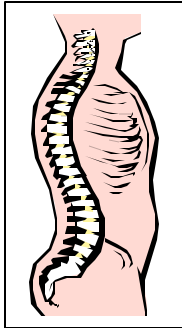


Caring For Your Back

Your Three Natural Curves



A little knowledge about your back can lead to big relief. Your spine is made up of 24 vertebrae cushioned by discs and arranged in three curves that form a natural S-shape. The cervical curve supports your head, the thoracic curve supports your ribs and shields internal organs, and the lumbar curve supports most of your upper body's weight. These three curves are properly aligned when your ears, shoulders, and hips are in a straight line. In this position, your weight is evenly distributed throughout your spine, and your back is least vulnerable to injury or pain.

Your Muscles: Strong Back-up

Your backbones support your upper body, protect your spinal cord, and give you mobility. But what supports your back? The muscles in your abdomen, pelvis, and legs. If they are strong and flexible, they help keep your back aligned and take much of the strain of working off your back. Symptoms of muscle strain are stiffness and aching in your lower back.

Causes of Back Strain Pain

Poor Posture

Slumping and slouching can be your back's undoing. Poor posture throws your back's natural curves out of alignment and makes your spine more vulnerable to injury. It also adds stress and strain to your lower back.

Stress

Do job or money worries keep you awake at night? Stress, worry, and the resulting fatigue can tense your nervous system and cause your

low back muscles to go into spasm. Finding ways to relax throughout the day can keep a "pain in the neck" from reaching your low back.

Lack of Exercise

It's better to work out than to have a bad back put you out of work. Weak and flabby muscles won't support your spine and can lead to a painful, exaggerated curve in your lower back. And let's be up front about excess weight and back pain: a potbelly just adds to the strain on your back and supporting muscles.

When to Seek Professional Treatment

See your practitioner if:

- ◆ back pain follows an impact injury or accident;
- ◆ you have pain for more than a few days;
- ◆ pain gets worse after a few days of rest;
- ◆ back pain interferes with your sleep or daily activities;
- ◆ you have shooting pains, tingling, numbness or weakness in your legs.

Your Best Play Is Prevention

For details about back maintenance, see these handouts:

- ◆ Back In Shape
- ◆ Stretching for Flexible Back and
- ◆ Keeping Your Back Strong.

For Further Info:

<http://www.drkoop.com/template.asp?page=channel&ap=93&cid=1056&subcid=1067&more=news>

<http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/ih/IH/WSIHW000/331/9519.html>

