

Top ten tips for a healthy back



Back pain affects up to 1 in 4 of the Australian population on any one day and is one of our most common health conditions¹. It can happen at any age and last days or years.

Here are our top ten tips to keep your back as healthy as possible:



EXERCISE REGULARLY

While walking, swimming, pilates and yoga are all excellent ways to strengthen your back and improve flexibility, any activity is good for you. Choose something that you enjoy to help you maintain your physical activity long term.



KEEP ACTIVE AND AVOID LONG PERIODS OF BED REST

Even when you have pain, gentle movement will help settle your back and strengthen your muscles.

Your physiotherapist can tailor an exercise program to suit your fitness level and give you advice on where to start.



LEARN CORRECT LIFTING TECHNIQUE

Correct lifting can help prevent injury and avoid back pain.

- When lifting a heavy object, position your body directly in front of it to lift and turn with your feet, not your back
- Carry the object close to your body.
- Bend your knees, using your legs – not your back – to bear the weight.



MAINTAIN A HEALTHY DIET AND LIFESTYLE

Carrying excess body weight can put additional pressure on your muscles and joints, which can lead to pain. Maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle will help you achieve a healthy weight.

- Enjoy a wide variety of foods from the main dietary food groups every day
- Limit saturated fat, added salt and sugars, and alcohol intake.



DON'T SLOUCH

Slouching doesn't necessarily cause discomfort, but over time it can place strain on muscles and soft tissue.

Posture pointers:

- Don't let your head slump forward
- Keep your shoulders relaxed, not hunched
- Don't cross your legs
- When standing, distribute your weight evenly on both legs.



QUIT SMOKING

Smoking can reduce the blood supply to discs between the vertebrae, which can lead to disc-degeneration. You can find information about ways to quit smoking at icanquit.com.au



TAKE BREAKS WHEN DRIVING

Take regular breaks when driving long distances. A firm seat provides better support and a rolled-up towel behind your back at waist level can provide extra lumbar support.



ADAPT YOUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

Tips for sitting at the computer:

- Use an upright chair that has good back or lumbar support
- Position your monitor so your head and shoulders are relaxed
- Keep your mouse close to your body
- Don't cradle your phone between your head and shoulder.

If your work is more manual and requires the use of tools:

- Avoid working where the floor is cluttered, uneven, wet or slippery
- Use long handled tools where possible
- Perform a variety of tasks, changing position frequently.



LEARN TECHNIQUES TO HELP MANAGE STRESS

Relaxation is a crucial part of easing the pain caused by muscle tension. While you cannot always avoid stress, you can learn to reduce and manage it. Learn to identify the signs of stress, identify its source, connect with friends and family who care, and make time for relaxation.

Simple breathing exercises can also help. Try breathing in through your nose while counting slowly to five, then breathing out to five. Keep doing this for three to five minutes.



SEEK A MEDICAL OPINION

Most back pain disappears within days or weeks. If your pain persists, gets worse or you experience any other symptoms (like feeling unwell), see your GP or other qualified healthcare provider.

The health and medical information provided is general information only and is not a substitute for advice from a qualified medical or other health professional. If in doubt, contact your GP or other qualified healthcare professional.

MYTH BUSTERS

MYTH #1

Moving will make my back pain worse

FACT

It is essential to keep moving². Muscles that are in spasm, due to pain, relax when gently moved and stretched. Gradually increase how much you are doing, and stay on the move.

MYTH #2

A scan will show me exactly what's wrong

FACT

There is a growing body of research that shows that not only do results of scans correlate poorly with symptoms in people with back pain³, but also that most people without back pain have changes on scans that do not cause any symptoms at all⁴.

MYTH #3

Pain equals damage

FACT

Recent research has changed our thinking of pain⁵. Level of pain has little relationship with damage to the spine and more to do with your unconscious and conscious interpretation of the level of threat the pain represents.

References

- 1** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australia's Health 2016. Canberra: AIHW, 2016 **2** Balagu, F. et al., 2012. Non-specific low back pain. The Lancet, 379(9814), pp.482-491 **3** Videman et al, (2003) Associations between Back Pain History and Lumbar MRI Findings. Spine (Phila Pa 1976). 2003 Mar 15; 28(6):582-8 **4** Brinjikji et al, (2015) Systematic Literature Review of Imaging Features of Spinal Degeneration in Asymptomatic Populations. AJNR Am J Neuroradiol. 2015 Apr; 36(4): 811-816 **5** Campbell et al (2013) Prognostic Indicators of Low Back Pain in Primary Care: Five-Year Prospective Study. The Journal of Pain. August 2013. Vol.14 (8):873-8

TAL Life Limited

GPO Box 5380 Sydney NSW 2001
Customer Service Centre: 1300 209 088
customerservice@tal.com.au
tal.com.au