

## Preventing and Reducing Back Pain



The National Athletic Trainers' Association has prepared a 10-step guide that people of all ages can use to reduce body stress, prevent back pain, and improve quality of life

Disability from back pain is second only to the common cold as a cause of lost work time.


According to the Arthritis Foundation, back pain affects 80 percent of the adult population at some point in their lives. In fact, back pain, limited mobility, and stiffness end up costing American consumers \$24 billion in treatment costs annually.

Following are recommendations to prevent and reduce back pain.

1. **Identify negative stresses:** Everybody has physical limitations that can lead to body imbalances, so it's important to identify problematic areas and correct these imbalances. Look at your sitting/standing posture. Do you complain that your muscles "feel tight" or weak? Do you use poor mechanics when lifting heavy items?

2. **Make yourself mobile:** Poor posture and muscle stiffness decrease the body's ability to move freely, which can lead to injury or pain. There are many ways to increase mobility, including daily stretches, or activities that increase flexibility and get the body moving in different directions. Try yoga, tai chi, swimming or pilates to keep you limber.

3. **Increase strength:** It's important to gain strength to improve overall balance and flexibility, thus reducing stress on the back. Exercises should involve the whole body, especially the core muscles of the stomach, back, hips and pelvis. At the same time, strengthening of the legs and shoulders can help you more easily squat, lift and carry even heavy items without overworking or injuring your back.



4. **Add aerobic exercise:** Physical activities like walking, swimming and running for at least 20 minutes three times a week increases muscular endurance and cardiovascular fitness. Aerobic activities also improve blood flow to the spine and help decrease daily stress.

5. **Pay attention to posture:** Try not to sit or drive for long periods of time. Get up every 15 to 30 minutes and move around or stretch to increase your mobility. When seated always remember to keep your hips and knees at right angles to one another and find a chair with adequate lumbar (lower back) support.

**6. Stand up straight:** When engaged in activities while standing, be sure to stand with your head up, shoulders straight, chest forward and stomach tight. Avoid standing in the same position for too long, though, and use your legs - rather than your back - when pushing or pulling heavy doors and other items.



**7. Use proper lifting mechanics:** When lifting objects from a position below your waist, stand with a wide stance and a slight bend at your hips and knees. Tighten your stomach as you lift and keep your back as flat as possible - do not arch or bend. When carrying heavy objects, keep them as close to your body as you can. Avoid carrying objects on only one side of your body.

**8. Get a good night's sleep -** Select a firm mattress and box spring that does not sag. Try to sleep in a position that allows you to maintain the natural curve in your back.

**9. Warm-up before physical activity:** Engage in a low impact activity prior to playing sports or exercising. Increasing muscle temperature and mobility will decrease the chance of injury.

**10. Improve your healthy lifestyle:** Obesity and smoking have been found to increase the incidence of back pain. Taking steps to improve your health will decrease the chance of back pain and improve your overall quality of life.

Always listen to your body: "If you are participating in any fitness routines or general activity and feel any twinges of back pain, you should stop immediately and consult your physician. Identifying the cause of the pain and treating it safely and appropriately will help you gain back mobility and range of motion and feel your physical best," according to Darrell Barnes, certified athletic trainer.

Source: National Athletic Trainers' Association

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