INSPIRED
To Make Healthy Choices

Physical activity can make your back stronger and lower your risk of back pain.

Staying a healthy weight lowers your risk of back pain.

Back pain is one of our society's most common medical problems.

In a 3 month period, about one-fourth (25%) of U.S. adults experience at least 1 day of back pain. In 2011, musculoskeletal disorders accounted for 33% of all workplace injuries and illnesses requiring days away from work. It's one of the most common reasons people visit the doctor or nurse.

The back and spine are designed to provide a great deal of strength, protecting the highly sensitive spinal cord and nerve roots, and be flexible, providing for mobility in all directions.

Acute back pain tends to come on suddenly and lasts from a few days to a few weeks while chronic back pain is typically described as lasting for more than three months and may come on quickly or slowly. Hot or cold packs - or sometimes a combination of the two - can be soothing to chronically sore, stiff backs. **Heat dilates the blood vessels,** both improving the supply of oxygen that the blood takes to the back and **reducing muscle spasms.** Heat also alters the sensation of pain. **Cold may reduce inflammation** by decreasing the size of blood vessels and the flow of blood to the area. Although cold may feel painful against the skin, it **numbs deep pain.**

In most cases, it is not necessary to see a doctor for back pain because pain usually goes away with or without treatment. However, a trip to the doctor is probably a good idea if you have numbness or tingling, if your pain is severe and doesn't improve with rest, or if you have pain after a fall or an injury.

The first step to preventing back injuries is to get in good physical shape and maintain it. Being overweight, especially when most of the excessive weight is carried in the abdomen, creates tremendous stress on the back.

Also, over time, **poor posture or repetitive stress can also strain muscle or create other soft tissue problems.** A muscle strain in the lower back can cause severe pain.

People are more likely to experience back pain as they get older, and many people hurt their backs when they lift, push, or pull something that's too heavy.

To avoid hurting yourself, follow these recommendations when lifting anything:

- Bend at the knees and use leg muscles rather than back muscles to lift
- Contract your stomach muscles
- Avoid twisting the low back while lifting; instead, pivot with the feet
- Carry heavy items as close to the body as possible
  - Distribute weight evenly on each side of the body
  - Learn your limits and get help when you're lifting something that you know is too heavy.

Other helpful tips to prevent back pain:

- Stay active, drink lots of water and eat a balanced diet.
- Exercise your core and stretch your legs and hips.
- Stop smoking or avoid any nicotine intake; smoking can slow healing, prolonging pain for people who have had back injuries, back surgery or broken bones.
- Stand up straight. Good posture can help prevent back pain. Try not to slouch when standing and sitting.
- Avoid cradling the phone in your neck.

Start TODAY! Anything you can do to improve your overall physical fitness and general health will benefit your spine and prevent and/or delay back pain.

Getting enough calcium and vitamin D can help keep your bones strong.

Most people have back pain at some point in their lives.

For more information:

Healthy Back
www.guideinc.org

"Inspired to Make Healthy Choices" Created by GUIDE, Inc.