

Lifestyle Changes

What lifestyle changes are recommended for low back pain?

Exercise and Physical Therapy

Physical activity plays a strong role in recovering from back pain and particularly in helping to prevent future pain and loss of function. An exercise program can include any or all of the following components: flexing, stretching, endurance training, strength building, and aerobic activity. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Exercise programs are individualized because people have different levels of pain and differing injuries that caused the pain initially.

Improving the strength, endurance, and function of your back helps minimize the chance of recurrence of back pain. One study showed that people who exercised after an initial episode of acute low back pain were less likely to experience a recurrence of that pain than people who did not exercise after the initial pain.

Any mild discomfort that you may feel as you begin an exercise program should gradually ease as your muscles become stronger. The key is to start an exercise program at a low level to ensure your comfort and proper technique, and then progress slowly as your symptoms allow. Exercises for specific muscles that stabilize the spine may help reduce the low back pain.

Diet/Weight

Obesity is a leading cause of back pain. Reducing your weight by only 10 percent can make a big difference in decreasing back pain. Extra abdominal fat and weight on the pelvis pulls the body forward and puts strain on your lower back muscles. Although obesity may not be the cause of the pain, it takes the pain to a whole new level. Extra weight throws off your posture and makes it difficult to properly align your body for a good sleep. It requires your back muscles to pick up the slack. Eat a healthy diet to maintain an ideal weight.

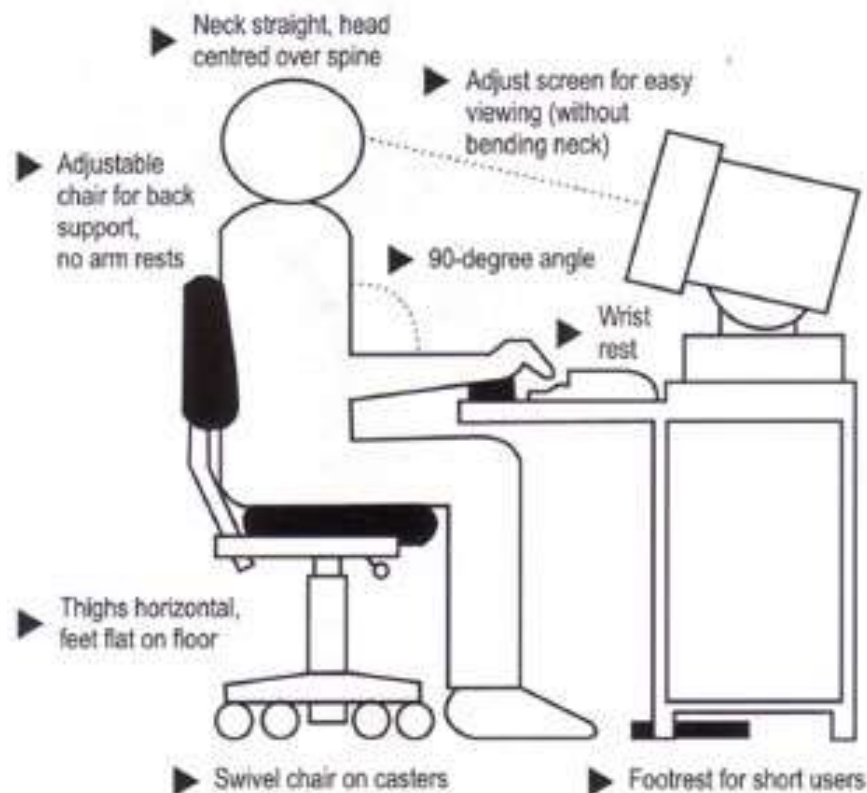
Ergonomic recommendations

1. Have a firm seat beneath you. Imagine sitting on a rubber swing which collapses inward as your weight goes on it. You have wobbly support beneath you. Now imagine a wooden swing which is firmly supporting your hips and low back. On the uneven swing your low back musculature and structures are working hard to adapt and are straining to keep the forces from aggravating your lumbar nerves (which are aggravated already). On the wooden swing which is stable, the extra support takes away the extra strain on the muscles and structures. This effect is

true on every surface on which you sit. Always find the seat that is firm underneath you. A moderate amount of cushion is ok, but the more solid the structure is, the more it will help you.

When in a car, use a firm pillow beneath you to fill in the sagging of the springs/cords in the bottom of the seat.

2. Use proper computer ergonomics. (see photo at bottom)
3. Use orthotics in your shoes to support the musculature as you walk and provide proper shock absorption while standing and walking. (we can provide you with a customized scan here in the office)
4. Lift properly and learn posture ergonomics. (Ask Dr. C for the water buffalo lecture)
5. Do light exercise to strengthen the low back.
6. Remember that chiropractic adjustments and decompression therapy are important to strengthen the low back structures and reduce nerve pressure and pain.



Sedentary Lifestyle

People who do not exercise regularly face an increased risk for low back pain, especially when they perform sudden, stressful activities such as shoveling, digging, or moving heavy items. Although no definitive studies have been done to prove the relationship between lack of exercise and low back pain, some doctors believe that an inactive lifestyle may be to blame in some cases. Lack of exercise leads to the following conditions that may threaten the back:

- Stiff muscles can make it hard to move, rotate, and bend the back.
- Weak stomach muscles can increase the strain on the back and cause an abnormal tilt of the pelvis.
- Weak back muscles may increase the risk for disk compression.
- Obesity puts more weight on the spine and increases pressure on the vertebrae and disks. However, studies report only a weak association between obesity and low back pain.

Improper or Intense Exercise

Improper or excessive exercise may also increase one's chances for back pain.

- Some research suggests that over time, high-impact exercise may increase the risk for degenerative disk disease. A survey of people who played tennis, however, found no increased risk for low back pain or sciatica.
- Between 30 - 70% of cyclists experience low back pain. One study reported that 70% of cyclists reported improvement simply by adjusting the angle of the bicycle seat.
- Improper exercise instruction and inattention to body movements can lead to back trouble. For example, a single jerky golf swing or incorrect use of exercise equipment (especially free weights, nautilus, and rowing machines) can cause serious back injuries.

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Disclaimer: This information is not intended as a substitute for medical or chiropractic professional help or advice, but is to be used only as an aide in understanding spinal and nerve issues.

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