

WELLBEING

A Monthly Newsletter Covering Health and Wellness

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Every Step You Take, Every Move You Make... Can Build a Healthier Back

“Oh my aching back.” That’s a phrase we hear all too often. About 80% of adults experience back pain. And, it’s said to be the number 2 reason people visit the doctor. Yet, there are simple adjustments you can make throughout the day to help you avoid, prevent or reduce back pain.

It starts with your posture. There are three normal curves in the spine: cervical, at the neck, thoracic or mid-back and lumbar, lower back region. When you are sitting, standing and moving you want to keep those curves (without exaggerating them). The goal of proper posture is to put the least amount of strain on the muscles and ligaments supporting the spine. Carry your body well and you’ll be less fatigued, and better able to prevent back pain.

Since many of us sit for long periods each day, it’s important to know how to sit for a healthy back. Sit up with your back straight; keep your shoulders back. (This may take practice when sitting at your computer.) The buttocks should touch the back of the chair. (If you can’t comfortably do this, the seat may be too wide for you.) Remember to keep the three normal back curves while sitting. (Don’t hunch or slump.) You can use a pillow or lumbar roll to help.

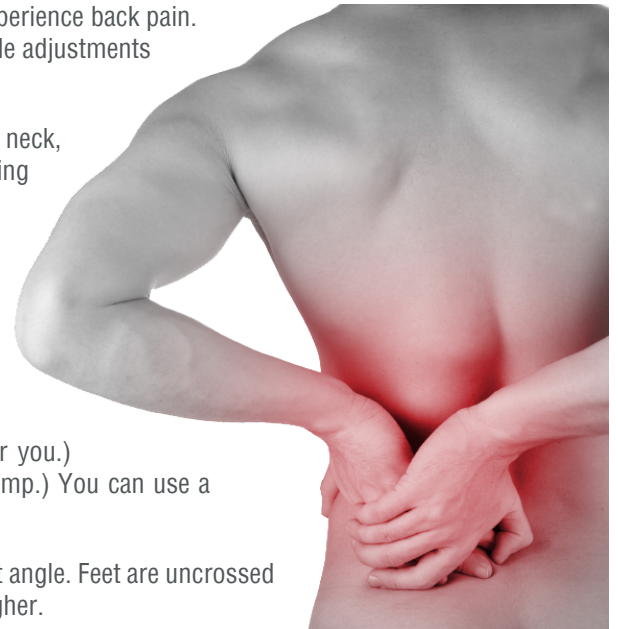
Sit in your chair with weight evenly distributed on both hips and your knees at a right angle. Feet are uncrossed and flat on the floor. Ideally your knees should be even with your hips or slightly higher.

Sit close enough to your work so it can be tilted up. Rest arms and elbows on desk or chair arms with shoulders relaxed.

Now that you are correctly settled, don’t stay there too long. Try to get up and move every 30 minutes or so. And when you do stand up, don’t bend forward at the waist. Scoot to the front of the seat and stand by straightening the legs.

A few back facts you may not know:

- 1) Prolonged bed rest will not cure back pain. Resting briefly can help, but stay in bed too long and you will weaken your muscles.
- 2) Heat is not the best thing for acute (severe) back pain. Try anti-inflammatories and gentle stretching, followed by an ice pack.
- 3) Being overweight can contribute to back pain. Excess weight, especially extra stomach weight, shifts your center of gravity forward and puts additional strain on your back muscles.
- 4) You should do weight-bearing exercises if you have back pain because strength training can help alleviate back pain and prevent further injury; check with your doctor before starting.
- 5) You may be able to prevent back pain and relieve pain you have by strengthening your abdominal muscles which help support the back. (Abs and back work together as part of your core.)
- 6) The best time to stretch is several times during the day – to keep muscles flexible and help prevent an injury.



Try These Smooth Moves for a Happier Back		
When you...	Do it like this	Because...
Stand	Keep one foot in front of the other and knees slightly bent	Takes the pressure off the low back
Sit	Keep knees slightly higher than hips	Provides good lower back support
Reach	Stand on a stool to reach objects that are higher than shoulder level	An overhead reach and pull down puts more strain on the back
Move a heavy item	Push it, and use your arms and legs to start the push.	Pushing is easier on your back than pulling
Lift	Kneel down on one knee with the other foot flat on the floor, as near as possible to the item you are lifting. Lift with your legs, not your back, keeping the object close to your body	Lifting is a pulling motion that is hard on your back
Carry	If you can, carry a smaller item in each hand; If you must carry one large object, keep it close to your body.	The heavier the object and the farther from your body, the more strain it puts on your back.
Sleep	If you sleep on your back, put pillows under your knees or lie on your side with a pillow between your knees.	Lying on your back puts 55 pounds of pressure on your back; a pillow under the knees cuts it in half.

Article sources: Cleveland Clinic; St. Joseph Health System, Lexington, Ky

