

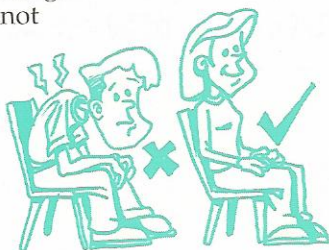
# BACK PAIN

Most back pain is caused by minor strains in the joints, muscles and ligaments which usually settle without treatment. However, even mild back pain is a warning sign that special care is needed to prevent more serious problems.

## RISKS

Anyone can have back trouble. We don't always stand and sit properly, so when we lift, pull, or bend, we can end up with back pain. People who may be at more risk include:

- mothers or mothers-to-be: joints of the lower spine are loosened by hormones which prepare the body for childbirth, combined with extra lifting (i.e. baby, car capsule, pram, bath, nappy bucket)
- people whose work involves heavy lifting and bending, particularly if not trained in correct lifting techniques
- people who sit for long periods in poorly designed work areas
- people who are unfit or lead an inactive life
- people with pre-existing neck or back problems
- people with poor mobility (e.g. have arthritis or are bedridden) or who stay in one position for long periods
- people who are overweight - being overweight can put more strain on your back.



## TREATING BACK PAIN

Early treatment can reduce your recovery time.

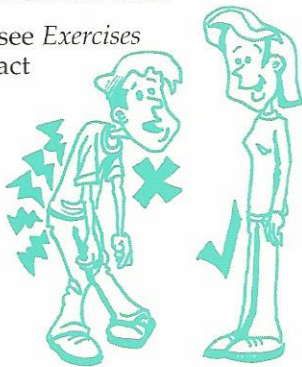
- Apply an ice pack on the area for 20 minutes. This will reduce inflammation. For muscle spasms, wrap a hot water bottle in a towel and apply it to the area. Don't use heat for the first day or so after a strain or sprain when acute pain, swelling or heat is present in the area (see *Sprains and Strains* Fact Card).
- Adopt comfortable positions. Try sleeping on a firm mattress with two pillows under your knees. Keep your back flat.
- Take pain relievers if in pain. Discuss with your pharmacist or doctor which is the best medicine for your problem (see *Pain Relievers* Fact Card).
- Do only necessary jobs. Avoid activities that may make the back pain worse, such as lifting and long periods of sitting, standing, bending and driving. Gradually increase activity with care and as comfort allows.
- Most back pain responds to stretching, exercise or manipulation. Choose a trained practitioner with skills in back care.
- After healing, a proper exercise program will help prevent re-injury - physiotherapists and chiropractors offer these services.

## IMPORTANT See your doctor if:

- back pain persists
- back pain travels to the buttocks or groin, or down one or both legs
- you have a fever or rash as well as back pain
- you have trouble passing urine or bowel motions
- there has been a recent injury or blow to your back.

## SELF CARE

- Be aware of daily activities that lead to backache.
- When lifting, lift with the load close to your body and your feet apart. Bend your hips and knees, not your back, and lift with your legs. Try not to bend or twist your spine.
- Different people need different lifting techniques. Learn how to care for **your** back, with regard to your body and its strengths, and the kind of lifting you do. Talk to a physiotherapist, chiropractor or osteopath about safe lifting practices for **your** body.
- If you sleep on a spring mattress, put boards on the bed base.
- Choose seats that are not too soft and that support your thighs along their whole length and allow your feet to rest on the ground (or a footrest).
- Maintain good posture when standing and sitting. Learn exercises to improve your posture and mobility (ask a physiotherapist or chiropractor).
- Maintain your ideal body weight (see *Weight Control* and Nutrition series of Fact Cards).
- Stand tall, tighten your stomach and tuck your bottom in when you walk, squat, get up, lift, carry and stand.
- If driving for a long time, take regular rest breaks to stretch or walk.
- Keep flexible (see *Exercises for Flexibility* Fact Card).
- Wear low-heeled shoes with arch support and cushioned heels.



Your **Self Care** pharmacist

**KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN**

DAVID S. NOLTE PHARMACY 701 - 703 RATHDOWNE ST., NTH CARLTON PH: 9349 1522 • 3049L

## RESIST

- Bending forward and twisting, especially when lifting or pulling.
- Standing still for long periods.
- Coughing or sneezing with your back bent over or twisted.
- Depending on pain relievers to relieve persistent pain (see your doctor).
- Carrying unbalanced loads.
- Straining when on the toilet while curled forward.



### Recommended reading:

HENDERSON, L.  
*Bad Backs - a self-help guide*  
Gore & Osment, 1992

### Other relevant Fact Cards:

- *Sprains and Strains*
- *Pain Relievers*
- *Exercises for Flexibility*
- *Weight Control*
- Nutrition series

### Contact:

**Your doctor** - listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book

**A physiotherapist** - at your nearest public hospital, local Community Health Centre or look in the yellow pages of the phone book

**Chiropractors Association of Australia** - listed under 'C' in the white pages of your capital city phone book

**Your Self Care pharmacist.** To find:

ACT	(02) 6283 4703	NSW	(02) 9437 5941
TAS	(03) 6231 2636	VIC	(03) 9903 9600
QLD	(07) 3844 4900	WA	(08) 9388 2886
SA	(08) 8272 1211		

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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