

Don't Twist and Shout

5 Back Pain Prevention Techniques

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Previously printed in
tonic
www.tonictoronto.com

Low back pain is all too common. In fact, the majority of Canadian adults (over two-thirds) have suffered from back pain in recent years, according to a 2003 Environics Research Group survey commissioned by the Canadian Chiropractic Association. Other studies have shown that more than 80 percent of adults have had at least one episode of low back pain in their lifetime. Ouch! It is also a sad truth that the biggest predictor of low back pain is previous low back pain! Despite the prevalence of this condition in our society, there are many strategies you can use to reduce your risk:

1 Be active. Did you know that bed rest is contraindicated for mild to moderate low back pain? Active recovery is the treatment of choice, with low impact cardiovascular exercise, like walking or stationary biking, recommended during times of acute pain. Quick resumption of your normal daily activities facilitates circulation to the painful area, speeding up the healing process. In addition, aerobic fitness can prevent problems in the first place.

2 Be strong. Once the acute phase of your back pain subsides, you can begin to incorporate strength training exercises into your routine. These should include spinal flexion (bending forward), spinal extension (bending backwards), and core stabilization (holding one position for an extended period trains your muscles to better support the hips and spine). Programs that are individually designed, supervised, and ongoing help the most. Working with a physiotherapist or personal fitness trainer who can assess your needs is ideal.

3 Be flexible. Stretching has been shown to have the greatest impact on low back pain. The more flexible you are, the more room your body has to accommodate movement in different directions. For example, if you slip on ice and

suddenly bend backwards, you will be better protected against low back injury if you have practiced stretching exercises that train the lower back to move in this direction. Another example is sitting at a desk all day without taking adequate movement breaks – if you work in front of a computer, make sure you take frequent opportunities to stretch and change position.

4 Lift smart. The most common cause of disc herniation is bending forward from the waist to lift something heavy, then rotating your torso while you are still bent over. To protect your back, learn the proper lifting technique – bend at your knees, straighten up, and then turn your entire body to deposit what you have lifted. Do not rotate your torso with something heavy in your arms!

5 Don't smoke! As if we needed one more reason to avoid cigarettes, there is a significant established connection between smoking and low back pain. The exact reason for this is unclear – reduced blood flow to the discs of the spine, as well as more osteoporosis, fractures and degenerative changes in smokers may be to blame. As well, smokers cough more than non-smokers, which may play a role.

If you suffer from low back pain, or have been sidelined in the past, you should seriously consider adding more exercise into your life. Being physically active will drastically reduce your chance of suffering from back pain – and is unparalleled in its role at preventing problems in the first place. No one wants to be robbed of their ability to enjoy life, so do everything in your power to safeguard yours!

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