Lifestyle Changes for Managing Back Pain

by LANA BARHUM

Living with Back Pain

If you have experienced back pain, or are currently living with back pain, you are not alone.

According to one report, published in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, the number of people reporting low back in the United States on a yearly basis is 15 to 20% with a lifetime occurrence of over 60%. It is the fifth most common reason people visit their doctors.

Back pain has any number of causes. It can result from an injury or stem from a chronic condition, such as arthritis or fibromyalgia, or it can be the result of being overweight and having a sedentary lifestyle.

Most back pain gets better on its own, with or without treatment. Surgery is rarely a necessary done to treat back pain.

If you are living with back pain, know that there are plenty of lifestyle changes and self-help strategies to help you prevent back pain, manage it and keep it from coming back.

Keep Moving

If your back is hurting, regular activity can help to relieve inflammation and ease muscle tension.

Exercises for low back pain can you help to strength your back muscles. They also help you to support your spine.

Research finds that most exercise is safe for people with back pain.

You should, however, ask your doctor before starting any exercises for your back, especially if you are in pain. He or she can offer recommendations for effective and safe exercises.

Watch Your Weight

Extra weight, especially in your midsection, makes back pain worse because it shifts your body forward and puts strain on your back.

Maintaining a healthy weight or losing a few pounds can ease your back issues and reduce stress on other joints.

Don’t Smoke

If you smoke, reducing your risk for back pain is a reason to quit.

According to researchers out of Northwestern University (NWU), smokers are more likely to develop chronic pain. The NWU researchers theorize that smoking interferes with brain functions associated with pain.

Another study, published in the *American Journal of Medicine,* finds that even former smokers are at a higher risk for developing back pain compared to those who have never smoked.

Sleep Better

Your back needs as much support as possible when you are sleeping with back pain.

Find a mattress that isn't too firm or too soft. The Better Sleep Council recommends replacing your mattress after no more than ten years, depending on support and comfort level.

But one study out of the University of Oklahoma suggests you may need to replace it even sooner. That study concludes sleeping on a newer mattress (less than 5 years old) results in increased sleep quality and reduced back pain.

And even if you have good mattress, sleeping in a bad position can still cause back pain.

Back sleepers can support their backs by putting pillows under their knees and side sleepers should place pillows to between their knees to help keep the spine in a more neutral position.

Sleeping on your stomach should be avoided because it causes your neck and head to twist putting stress on your back and spine. But if you have to sleep on your stomach, try placing a pillow below your pelvis for better back support.

Watch Your Posture

If you have a desk job, chances are you spend a lot of time sitting at a computer. Sitting hunched over puts stress on back muscles and joints.

When you are at your desk, sit straight and as far back as possible in your chair. Keep your feet flat on the ground and when you stand, slowly pull your shoulders back and stand on both your feet to evenly balance your weight.

If you stand for long periods, keep your head up and your stomach in. If you can, rest one foot on a stool and alternate your feet every 15 to 20 minutes.

Be Careful with Lifting

Don't bend over from the waist when you need to lift a heavy objection.

Instead, make sure your feet are shoulder width apart, with one foot slightly in front of the other, similar to a karate stance.

Next, squat down, bending at the knees only. If you need to, put one knee to the floor and the other in front of you so you are half kneeling.

Make sure you maintain good posture by looking straight ahead and keeping your back straight. Lift the object slowly by straightening your knees while keeping your back straight and not twisting your body.

Hold the load close to your body at belly button level. Use your feet to change direction and use small steps.

As you move, keep your hips in line with your shoulders. When you put the load down, squat down with your knees and move back up by straightening your knees.

Don’t Sit for Too Long

The human body is designed to keep moving, but many Americans spend most of their days sitting still. In fact, the British Journal of Sports Medicine reports that most adults spend at least 9 to 10 hours each day sitting.

Sitting too long can cause some of your muscles to shorten. Your posture could also become locked and throw off your spine’s alignment.

Set a timer to remind you to get up and move at least every 45 minutes and save yourself the struggle of living with back pain.

Wear the Right Shoes

Your heels and flip-flops may lead to foot instability which eventually result in back pain. Those types of shoes are not made for walking long distances.

Commute in your comfy flats or supportive tennis shoes. Consider adding cushion inserts and look for shoes offering arch good arch support.