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Advancing the distinctive philosophy and practice of osteopathic medicine

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Prevention, The Best Treatment for Back Pain

An estimated 50 million Americans suffer from chronic back pain, and it is one of the top reasons for doctor visits. Back pain has many causes - the most common not related to trauma are poor posture, excessive weight, poor workstation setup, lack of exercise and limited flexibility. Fortunately many of them are preventable and treatable.

Depending on the cause, back pain can occur in different areas of the back and inflict different types and degrees of pain. Some patients experience an occasional dull pain, while others suffer constant agonizing pain making even the simplest movements difficult. Either way, back pain can prohibit people from completing normal daily activities.

To reduce the risk of back pain, patients must understand what causes

unnecessary strain on the back. Once patients understand the causes, they can modify their lifestyles and activities to prevent or eliminate back pain.

Here are some tips for preventing or minimizing the occurrence of back pain:

- Listen to your body, and don't push through pain during any exercise or activities.
- Set up your work and home office ergonomically. Use a small lumbar support at your waist level when sitting, feet flat on the floor with the knees at a 90 degree angle. The middle of the computer monitor should be at eye level, and the keyboard just above your lap with the arms at 90 degrees or a little lower.
- Get up and move. Do not sit for more than one hour at a time. Take one minute each hour to stretch a different part of your body.
- Use good body mechanics when lifting or moving objects. Avoid bending over at the waist to pick things up; use your legs - never your back.
- If you have to perform heavy manual labor, take frequent breaks, and stretch throughout the day.

- Don't be a weekend warrior. Take time to stretch every day in preparation for your favorite weekend sports.
- A tight neck and hamstrings also put unneeded pressure on the back. Make sure to stretch all areas of the body.
- Strong core muscles help support your back. Simple balance exercises such as standing on one leg for 1-2 minutes will work your abdominal muscles without the need for sit-ups.
- If you are re-starting an exercise routine, start low and slow. See how your body adapts before increasing time or intensity.

If taking preventive measures do not prevent back pain, or an existing condition worsens, a visit to the physician's office is necessary. After examining a patient with chronic back pain, a physician can determine what forms of treatment or testing may be needed.

Osteopathic physicians (DOs) offer another form of treatment called osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT). OMT is a hands-on treatment where DOs use their hands to examine the back and other parts of the body such as joints, tendons,

ligaments, and muscles, for pain and restriction during motion that could signal an injury or impaired function. OMT can be helpful in relieving back pain as well as relieving discomfort and musculoskeletal abnormalities associated with a number of disorders including asthma, carpal tunnel syndrome, menstrual pain, sinus disorders, and migraines.

Regardless of the method of treatment your physician chooses, practicing healthy habits and taking preventive measures will reduce your chances of suffering from back pain whether you are 5 years old or 75 years old. Taking care of your body before a problem appears is always the best medicine.

A study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* reported that patients receiving OMT for low back pain required significantly less medication and less physical therapy than those who didn't receive OMT.

This information is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to be used in place of a physician diagnosis. If you are experiencing health problems, we strongly suggest you contact your physician or find a DO in your area.

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