

Back Pain and Chiropractic

Walking upright on two feet has advantages, but it also puts intense pressure on the spine, as well as on other muscles and bones. Add to this improper sitting, lifting, or reaching—and the normal wear and tear of working and playing—and you have the perfect recipe for back pain. That’s why back pain is the 2nd most common reason for visits to the doctor’s office, outnumbered only by upper-respiratory infections. In fact, some experts say, as many as 80% of us will experience a back problem at some time in our lives.¹

Back injuries are a part of everyday life. They can cause a sharp pain or a dull ache and can be accompanied by a tingling, numbness, or burning sensation. You may also feel weakness, pain, or tingling in your pelvis and upper leg—a condition known as sciatica. The spine is quite good at dealing with back injuries. Minor injuries usually heal within a day or 2. Some pain, however, continues. What makes it last longer is not entirely understood, but researchers suspect that stress, mood changes, and the fear of further injury may prevent patients from being active and exacerbate the pain.

The American Chiropractic Association Recommends the Following Tips for Back Pain Prevention:

- ◆ Maintain a healthy diet and weight.
- ◆ Remain active—under the supervision of your doctor of chiropractic.
- ◆ Avoid prolonged inactivity or bed rest.
- ◆ Warm up or stretch before exercising or other physical activities, such as gardening.
- ◆ Maintain proper posture.
- ◆ Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.
- ◆ Sleep on a mattress of medium firmness to minimize any curve in your spine.
- ◆ Lift with your knees, keep the object close to your body, and do not twist when lifting.
- ◆ Quit smoking. Smoking impairs blood flow, resulting in oxygen and nutrient deprivation to spinal tissues.
- ◆ Work with your doctor of chiropractic to ensure that your workstation is ergonomically correct.

Chiropractic Treatment for Back Pain

If you experience back pain, consult your doctor of chiropractic. More than 30 million Americans sought chiropractic care last year alone. Past studies have indicated that consumers are very happy with the chiropractic care they receive.

With a thorough knowledge of the structure and functioning of the human body, doctors of chiropractic make diagnoses and take steps to correct problems using spinal adjustments, dietary and lifestyle advice, and other natural tools.

Spinal manipulation—the primary form of treatment performed by doctors of chiropractic—is a recommended option for back pain treatment, rated as such by many state and workers’ compensation guidelines. Research has shown that manipulative therapy and spinal manipulation are not only safe and effective, but can cut costs and get workers back on the job faster than other treatments. A recent medical study has also pointed out that manual manipulation offers better short-term relief of chronic back pain than medication.²

When choosing a doctor of chiropractic:

- ◆ Be sure the chiropractor has attended an **accredited chiropractic college**. A list can be found on the ACA’s Web site at http://www.acatoday.com/media/whatis/careers/cce_accredited.shtml.
- ◆ Make sure the chiropractor **is licensed to practice in your state**. After graduating from an accredited chiropractic college, doctors of chiropractic must pass rigorous state and national board exams before they can practice. To find your state licensing board contact information, go to ACA’s Web site at http://www.acatoday.com/about/state_boards.shtml.
- ◆ **Talk to your friends, family, and co-workers**. The best referrals often come from satisfied patients.
- ◆ **Talk to the doctor**. The chiropractor should be willing to answer your questions and should talk freely with you about your concerns and course of treatment.
- ◆ Visit ACA’s Web site at www.acatoday.com to search for an **ACA member doctor of chiropractic** near you.

References

1. Vallfors B. Acute, subacute and chronic low back pain: Clinical symptoms, absenteeism and working environment. *Scan J Rehab Med Suppl* 1985;11:1-98.
2. Giles L, Muller R. Chronic spinal pain: A randomized clinical trial comparing medication, acupuncture, and spinal manipulation. *Spine* 2003 July 15;28(14):1490-1502.

In a recent informal survey, members of the American Chiropractic Association’s House of Delegates rated the jobs they consider to be the most “back breaking.” In their opinion, the following occupations cause the most stress and strains on the muscles of the back.

10. Auto mechanics. They work in physically awkward positions all day long—bending over cars, sliding under cars, etc. Having to look “up and back” at the underside of cars causes neck problems, as well.

9. Nursing home workers have to lift elderly people into and out of bed. The workers’ bodies can become twisted and off-center. Sometimes the seniors make sudden movements, which can result in workers’ unexpected injuries.

8. Delivery drivers are always running, often carrying heavy and awkward packages. Packages shipped via UPS, FedEx, etc., have increased in weight over the years. The job also involves a lot of driving, which is rough on the back.

7. Firefighters/EMTs. When they have a job to do, the conditions are extreme. They have to deal with fire and the water pressure from hoses and chop obstacles down with an axe to get closer to the fire. They often have to carry people to safety, which is particularly difficult if the victim is obese or incapacitated.

6. Shingle roofers. The worker’s body is always at angle, twisted, or in some other awkward position.

5. Farmers lift heavy equipment and bags of feed and grain. When doing fieldwork, they have to constantly turn backward to watch equipment that is pulled behind a tractor. Depending on the equipment, dairy farmers have to either stand all day long, or stand up and kneel back down repeatedly.

4. Police officers sit in their cars for long periods of time, which is rough on the lower back. When called into action, they have to make sudden movements. They often face resistance from those they are arresting or they can be attacked, which may harm the back. Police officers also wear belts that can weigh up to 40 pounds, which is a common cause of chronic back pain.

3. Landscapers. Landscaping may involve more heavy lifting than any other profession. Rocks, heavy dirt, sand, peat moss, and mulch are all extremely heavy. Wheelbarrows can twist and turn, wrenching the workers’ backs—particularly when they attempt to “catch” the slipping wheelbarrow.

2. Construction workers’ jobs can involve hammering, lifting, steelwork, or ironwork—all in very awkward positions. Moving steel beams can wreak havoc on the entire body.

1. Heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers. The constant compression and vibration from such trucks can damage the back. Prolonged sitting puts pressure on the spine, which can result in disc degeneration. Liquid-carrying trucks are particularly bad. When this type of truck comes to a sudden stop, the fluid in the truck’s tank slams back and forth, and the driver feels the impact. Also, because professional truck drivers are always on the road, their diets are seldom what they should be, which can contribute to back problems.

Your doctor of chiropractic has the knowledge, training, and expertise to help you understand what your problem is and, in many cases, manage it successfully. Remember, however, that the treatment program can be successful only with your active participation. If your doctor of chiropractic feels that he or she cannot help you, you will be directed to another health care provider.



For More Information

To find more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA’s Web site at www.acatoday.com or call 800-986-4636.

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