

EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES THAT MAY BE HURTING YOUR BACK

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80% of all Canadians will suffer at least one significant episode of back pain in their lives. Back pain can negatively impact an individual's work, recreational, and social life. Back pain prevention can go a long way in reducing the risk of injury. Below are some tips on how to overcome some of the common everyday activities that can contribute to back pain.

1. **Improper lifting is a risk factor associated with back pain.** There are several strategies that should be employed during lifting activities. Maintaining the natural curve/hollow (lordosis) of your low back is important, as this is its strongest and most secure position. Avoid awkward postures such as bending, reaching, and twisting/turning. Whenever possible, you should square your body toward the object being lifted, turn your whole body



by moving your feet, and keep the object close to your body. Contracting your abdominal muscles during lifting, lowering, and moving activities improves spinal stability, referred to as bracing. You should also bend at the legs and not the waist, lifting slowly and smoothly, not jerking. Minimizing lift load and exposure, taking mini-breaks, and job rotations can also be helpful. The use of assistive devices such as dollies, handgrips, and pull carts is also recommended.

2. **The physical strain of sitting:** Most people that sit for prolonged periods of time will eventually adopt a poor posture that includes losing the natural hollow of the low back, rounding or slouching forward of the upper back and shoulders, and a forward head poking position. This can lead to significant back pain as these less than ideal positions put cumulative compression and strain on the spine. Take 10 to 30 second stretch or posture breaks every 20 to 40 minutes to make sure weight is evenly distributed, your shoulders are not rounding forward, and you are not slouching.

3. **Working in stooped positions:** When we keep our backs in a neutral/straight position, the mechanical load on the spine is considerably lower than when your back is bent forward. Many activities around the home and workplace cause you to bend forward and stoop. The longer you work in these forward bent positions, the more likely you are to experience back problems. In order to minimize the risk of injury, you should interrupt the stooped position at regular intervals before pain starts. Trying to find alternative ways of completing tasks without stooping is ideal.



4. **Smoking contributes to an increase in spinal problems.** Smoking has been shown to



decrease bone mineral density and increase the risk of osteoporosis and future fractures. The reduced blood circulation found in smokers deprives spinal discs of vital nutrients which can lead to premature degeneration. Smoking may also provoke disc herniation through coughing. Exposure to secondhand smoke during childhood may also increase the risk of developing back problems later in life.

5. **Lack of physical activity de-conditions the body.** This makes us more susceptible to cumulative spinal strain and injury. For optimal functioning, your muscles and joints need a steady supply of oxygen-rich blood. Regular exercise increases our functional capacity to withstand occupational, recreational, and everyday stresses on our back more efficiently, thereby minimizing the risk of injury.

Decreasing your risk for back pain is the first step in prevention. For some, back pain can be dramatically minimized or avoided; while for others it needs to be managed so that its negative effects on activities of daily living can be reduced. If you are suffering from back pain, a qualified health professional can determine the cause of your pain and prescribe appropriate therapy, exercises, and back sparing strategies specifically for your circumstance. For more information visit www.nhwc.ca.



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