



SPINAL COLUMN

Newsletter

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Dr. Issam Ayache

Tel.: 961 1 747 165

Doctor of Chiropractic

drayache@yahoo.com

Cell. : 961 3 747 165

30 TIPS FOR BETTER SPINE HEALTH

These tips were recommended by the American Academy of Spine Physicians:

1. Exercise Regularly: Spinal tissue repair and remodeling is influenced by the stresses placed upon them. Regular exercise and strengthening activities will promote a healthier, stronger and more stable spine. Exercise does not have to be overly strenuous to achieve significant benefits. A regular activity such as a daily walk can make a huge difference. Start an exercise program slowly to give your muscles a chance to warm up and loosen. Check with your doctor prior to engaging in an exercise program.

2. Eat Healthy: Proper nutrition will support spine development and repair. A proper diet will also help to strengthen spinal tissues thus reducing the risk for injury.

3. Maintain Good Posture: Assume efficient and supportive postures while lying, sitting, and standing to reduce strain on spinal tissues, and reduce the risk for spinal injury and to promote spinal health.

4. Invest in a Good Pillow and Mattress: The average individual spends approximately one third of his life sleeping, therefore; proper support of the spine and head during this period will strongly influence spinal health. A good pillow and mattress will also facilitate more restorative sleep. In some instances an individual may benefit by the use of more than one pillow.

5. Maintain Spine Flexibility: Regular activity and stretching helps maintain flexibility of the spine; flexibility which is required to reduce the risk of injury.

6. Balanced Carrying: Always attempt to carry items over 10 kilos in a balanced fashion, dispersing the weight as evenly as possible from right to left. Do not overload your luggage, backpack or purse.

7. Take Periodic Breaks: Avoid sustained postures. During episodes of prolonged sitting or standing, periodically take a break, stretch your legs and back. Periodic stretching will help; keeping you from tightening up and injuring the spine.

8. Use Proper Phone Technique and Equipment: Avoid cradling the phone between the neck and the shoulder. Use a headset if prolonged phone use is required at home or at work which will allow you to maintain a neutral head and neck position.

9. Sleep on Your Back or Side: These positions are generally more supportive of the spine than lying face down.

10. Good Sleep Support: Sleep on a supportive mattress. Do not sleep on your stomach. If you sleep on your side, place a pillow between your knees to reduce rotation

of the low back, and try to keep your legs bent at the knees and at the hips. This position which reduces the stress on the low back.

11. Invest in Proper Shoes and Footwear: The average person takes approximately 5,000 — 8,000 steps during the course of a normal day. Proper foot and ankle support will reduce stress upon the knees and hips as well as the back.

12. Invest in Good Chairs: Individuals spend the majority of their lives in a sitting position. Chairs greatly influence sitting posture. Poor chairs contribute to chronic spine problems; well- designed chairs promote spine health.

13. Have Regular Spinal Check-Ups: It's much easier to prevent a problem than to correct one.

14. Use Proper Lifting Techniques: Proper lifting technique will reduce the risk for spine injury. Keep the back straight and bend the legs and hips when lifting; this reduces stress on the back. Avoid lifting objects higher than your waist whenever possible. Face the object you wish to lift. When lifting hold the objects close to the body. Do not twist while lifting. When possible push rather than pull an object.

15. Walk Efficiently: Walking requires the use of over 200 individual muscles. It requires the use of all muscles of the spine and pelvis. Walk erect with your head and neck in a neutral position. Avoiding slumping while walking. Avoid high heels and platform shoes. Avoid or reduce excessive back extension (swayback) during walking.

16. Do Not Overwork: When possible modify postures and physical activity to reduce the risk of muscle fatigue and back strain.

17. Avoid Excessive High-Impact Activities: Each time you strike your foot during walking, running or jumping, the shock of impact is absorbed by the joints of the feet, ankles, legs, hips and low back. Wear proper footwear to reduce the degree of shock to the spine.

18. Think Ergonomically: Seek the optimum work environment. This requires an adjustable workstation to properly support the extremities and the spine. An efficient work environment will include proper phone equipment, an adjustable chair, an efficient keyboard and adjustable monitor. The work surface should have adjustable height. It will also require proper lighting. A footrest will contribute to reduced stress on the spine. Assume a relaxed yet supported posture.

19. Use Products that Promote Good Posture and Spine Health: Utilize products which support the spine from the ground up. Use support-enhancing products that can be added to poorly designed furniture and seating.

20. Listen to Your Back: Avoid positions and activities which contribute to increased back pain or cause back pain radiating down the legs. Avoid those positions which elicit numbness or tingling. If back symptoms should persist or progress, see a spine physician. If you are involved in an activity that causes or increases back pain, think about what you can change to alleviate the pain. Your body will usually tell you what it needs if you take time to listen to it.

21. Maintain Optimum Body Weight. Excessive bodyweight increases stress upon the tissues of the spine, thereby increasing the risk for abnormal “wear and tear”.

Excessive body weight also contributes to alteration of the normal curves of the spine which can lead to stress on the spine.

22. Avoid Smoking: Smoking increases the risk for many life threatening conditions, Smoking is a habit which promotes tissue inflammation and impairs the healing process. Smoking contributes to blood vessel disease which can impair blood flow to many parts of the body including the back...

23. Get a Spine care Education: Whenever possible learn more about your spine and how to take care of it.

24. Drink Water: An adequate amount of water is vital to good health. The muscular tissues require water to function and to repair themselves.

25. Get Enough Sleep: Sleep is essential to good health, mental alertness, tissue growth and repair. An adequate amount of restful sleep is required to restore the body. This is related to the amount of time spent sleeping and the quality of sleep. Back pain is the most common form of nighttime pain. Many individuals with back pain suffer from fragmented sleep and wake up feeling unrefreshed.

26. Wear a Supportive Bra: A supportive bra will reduce strain placed upon the neck and upper back. A bra which is not supportive may contribute to rounding of the mid-back resulting in increased risk for chronic back pain and a humped posture.

27. Support the Abdomen during Pregnancy: A protuberant abdomen during pregnancy increases the forward curvature of the low back. This increases strain on the discs and joints of the low back. In pregnancy a brace which supports the pelvis and abdomen, will reduce strain on the low back. The use of a brace should be discussed with an obstetrician and/or spine physician. Such a brace should be fitted by a healthcare professional.

28. Increase Abdominal Strength: The abdominal muscles help support the low back and pelvis. The abdominal muscles surround about 2/3 of the lower part of the body. Strengthening the abdominal muscles will increase spinal stability and reduce the risk for spine injury. Conditioned abdominal muscles will also contribute to more efficient walking. Strong abdominal muscles will fatigue less during prolonged standing or prolonged sitting thereby, protecting the low back.

29. Frequently Adjust Your Posture: Alternate between sitting and standing tasks to reduce stress placed upon the spine. During long periods of standing, rest one foot on a low support, and alternate the feet.

30. Learn to Relax: Learn and apply relaxation techniques to manage stress both on the job and off the job. This will help to reduce muscle tension and pain from those muscles.

<i>Your questions and comments are welcomed and appreciated</i>
