

PHYSICAL
THERAPY
SPECIALTIES

A photograph showing a person's back being massaged by a therapist. The therapist's hands are visible, one resting on the shoulder and the other on the lower back. The person is wearing a dark grey tank top. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting like a clinic or spa.

BACK PAIN

REPORT

Introduction



If back pain is preventing you from sitting, standing, walking as far as you like or interrupting your workday, this advice will help you regain the ability to perform the activities you need and want to perform to get on with your life.

In this report I would like to help you to understand some of the common reasons for experiencing back pain and provide you with some essential advice for getting out of back pain quickly.

The three most common causes of back pain are:

ARTHRITIS OF THE SPINAL JOINTS



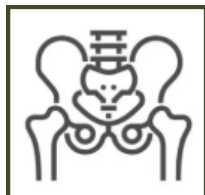
Degenerative changes of the joints between the spinal vertebrae and degenerative changes of the discs between the vertebrae account for most of the back pain in people 50 years of age and older. Symptoms include morning stiffness, difficulty after sitting; especially when moving from a sitting to a standing position when first getting out of bed, difficulty standing for a prolonged period and limited walking tolerance. If one or more of the spinal nerves are compressed by the reduced space these degenerative changes can cause between the vertebrae, often pain will extend into the buttock and down one or both legs. This condition responds very favorably to much of the advice provided in this article.

SPINAL DISC ISSUE SUCH AS A BULGING OR HERNIATED DISC



This condition affects younger people. Most people with a herniated disc are 35 years of age or younger. When there is a herniated disc, sitting is very uncomfortable and most of the time the pain is not only located in the lower back but also extends into the leg. Bending increases pain in the back or down the leg. Often standing and gentle movement helps to ease the intensity of the pain. Herniated discs want to heal and will recover if the strain on the disc can be minimized allowing the body to reabsorb (shrink) the bulge that is pressing on the nerve. Physical Therapy and training in good self-care can help a person avoid risky surgery.

A PROBLEM WITH THE SACROILIAC JOINTS



The sacroiliac joints are located at the base of your spine where your spine joins your pelvis and hips. These joints can sustain injury from either sustained poor posture or from a trauma such as a trip and fall, especially when landing onto your buttocks. This problem is often misdiagnosed as a disk problem because pain often extends from the sacroiliac joint into the buttocks or down the side of the leg. X-rays and MRIs do not show problems unless there is major damage to the sacroiliac joints. A small displacement of this joint can result in tremendous pain and limit tolerance for activity significantly. Simple movement tests can detect this problem and gentle forms of manipulation can correct the issue. Often patients need to wear a stabilizing belt for a short period of time to allow the structures that support the sacroiliac joint to recover. Sacroiliac pain is usually located at the very base of the lower back. It is often worse when walking or standing but can also intensify while sitting. Sacroiliac joint problems respond very well to gentle manipulations and a series of strengthening exercises.

10 Ways to reduce or eliminate back pain:

01

— Improve your posture and avoid inactivity

After an injury to the lower back, a person often makes the mistake of resting for too long. A brief period of rest is important, however, people who resume gentle activity quickly also recover more fully and more rapidly. Even though there is often an incident that seems to start the back pain, often old postures and movement habits have resulted in weakness that develops in the lower back prior to the actual onset of pain. Walking is very important for a healthy spine. At first you may only be able to take a short walk, but as your back pain lessens, walks will often leave you feeling much better. Improving your work postures and ergonomics often helps the most. Sometimes the simplest corrections have the most profound benefits. If you need advice on how to improve your posture, work ergonomics etc. a Physical Therapist is a great resource.

02

— Sleep with a pillow between your knees

Our lower backs do not tolerate much rotation or twisting. Sleeping on your side is often the most comfortable position especially during episodes of back pain. While lying on your side place a pillow between your knees all the way down to your feet. This helps to keep your lower body in better alignment with your upper body so that you are not positioned in a twisted position for a long period of time while sleeping. Avoid sleeping on your stomach. Sometimes resting on your back with your hips and knees elevated to 90° can relieve intense back spasm and allow the muscles to relax. Most people however cannot sleep all night in this position and find the side lying position more comfortable

10 Ways to reduce or eliminate back pain:

03

— Bend by using your hips instead of your back

Our hips are made with strong muscles especially in our gluteal region. These were made for squatting and bending. Our spinal muscles are very small and are made for fine movements and control. Often without thought we bend forward and return upright while performing tasks using only the small back muscles. By bending your knees and hips, a person can bend or stoop forward and put minimal strain on the lower back. You can learn how to do this by placing your hands on your knees and squatting partway down while poking your buttocks out behind you. When the back is very sensitive, the support from your hands will help to protect your back. A person can learn to bend like this to perform most activities which help protect the smaller muscles, discs and joints in the lower back.

04

— Learn how to exercise your deep abdominal muscles and build a good general fitness program

Not everybody needs to stretch, but if you tend to be tight in your hamstrings, calves and buttocks or thighs, a stretching routine will help ease much of the pressure placed on your lower back while sitting or bending. Almost everyone benefits from strengthening the deep abdominal muscles. Pilates has become a very popular form of exercise because it strengthens the “core” muscles. These muscles help to support your torso so that all the muscular support is not coming from the small lower back muscles. It’s amazing how this helps a person perform more activity, relieve pressure on the nerves, and relieve back pain while preventing further back flareups.

10 Ways to reduce or eliminate back pain:

05

Stretch tight leg and hip muscles

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06

Use Ice or Heat

Ice and heat are wonderful natural relievers of pain, inflammation, and muscle spasm. When pain is intense, ice is always your best choice. Ice helps to reduce inflammation while stimulating circulation. If your back is feeling especially tight and stiff in the muscles rather than intensely painful, heat helps to relax muscles and allows you to stretch more easily. Often chronic arthritic back pain responds wonderfully to moist heat. 10 to 15 minutes of heat or ice is usually enough. After taking a break, repeat as often as you like

07

Lack of water (hydration) and wrong foods makes pain worse

Drink plenty of water and avoid foods that are made with white flour and refined sugar. Reduce meat and dairy intake. These foods make inflammation worse.

10 Ways to reduce or eliminate back pain:

08

Wearing good footwear makes a difference.

Wear comfortable and supportive, well-fitting shoes to absorb shock before it goes to your back

09

Get enough sleep and try to reduce stress. Do things that bring you joy

Our muscles recover during deep sleep. Often our busy stressful lives keep us up late at night and get us up early in the morning. Try to structure your day so that you can get at least seven or eight hours of sleep. Taking time to breathe deeply from the abdomen/ diaphragm helps to reduce pain intensity and relax muscles. There are many Apps available to help a person use guided imagery and mindful meditation to help calm your mind and body and this is very helpful to reduce pain.

10

Avoid sitting for more than 20 minutes at a time

Sitting puts the most strain on our spine. Many of our jobs these days require prolonged sitting. This can cause inflammation and microtears to the cushioning discs between the vertebrae. The more a person can avoid prolonged sitting, the quicker they recover. Some options for desk workers are to purchase a sit stand workstation or to set a timer to remind you to stand and move around even if only briefly before sitting down again

Next Steps

Where do you go from here?

If pain is severe, extending down your leg(s) and producing weakness or if you're having difficulty controlling your bowel or bladder, you should seek medical attention promptly. Often back pain, even fairly intense pain will begin to subside in a few days and the advice above will help tremendously. If you are unsure whether you should see a medical doctor, a brief assessment from a physical therapist can help sort out whether this is necessary and get you pointed in the right direction.

One of our physical therapists would be happy to perform a brief assessment at no charge to help you find a solution. We are here to help!

Call us and schedule a free discovery visit

925-417-8005

Schedule a discovery visit on our website

www.pt-specialties.com

About the author

Ida Hirst, PT has been practicing physical therapy for over 30 years. She established a private practice in Pleasanton, California in 1989 where she has helped hundreds of people suffering from back pain recover and begin enjoying an active lifestyle once again. She continues to study the latest techniques developed in the field of physical therapy, health and wellness.



**There are options for your
back pain, please let us know
if we can further help you in
your healing journey**

Contact

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