

# Spine Wellness Tips

## Drop Some Pounds!

One contributing factor to back pain is obesity. Being overweight can significantly contribute to symptoms associated with osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, degenerative disc disease, spinal stenosis and spondylolisthesis. If you are overweight, talk to your physician about starting your weight loss journey. Successful weight loss takes a combination of eating right, exercise and family/social support.

## Put Out The Cigarettes!

Smoking decreases the delivery of nutrients and oxygen to your body, including your spine. This could lead to advanced aging and degeneration of your body. Smoking is also associated with an increased risk for failed spinal fusion surgery. There are many smoking cessation products and programs available. If you are a smoker, talk to your physician about the best way for you to quit.

## Get Moving - Exercise!

Exercise is essential to having a healthy back. Research has shown that those who exercise regularly are less likely to suffer from back pain. Also, people that exercise recover more quickly if an injury occurs. Exercise should consist of three components: strengthening, stretching and cardiovascular activities. To have a healthy back, try to strengthen your abdominal, back and leg muscles; stretch out your legs and hips; and try to get in better shape.

## Straighten Up!

Poor posture and improper lifting techniques place abnormal stress on the spine. Over time abnormal stress can lead to structural changes in the spine, including degeneration of discs and joints. To avoid back and neck pain from poor posture, maintain a neutral spine. A neutral spine maintains the spine's three natural curves.

## Get Enough Sleep!

The spine benefits greatly from adequate sleep. Our spine works hard all day to support our body, and a period of rest is essential for proper functioning. Try to get an average of seven hours of sleep per night.

## Eat Well!

Healthy eating habits include eating the right kinds of foods, in the right amounts. Eat lean proteins, lots of fruits and vegetables, and low-fat dairy products. It is better to eat smaller meals often throughout the day, rather than a few large meals. Proper nutrition can decrease inflammation and keep your weight down. This also helps to decrease or prevent spine pain.

## Stay Hydrated!

A great deal of back pain is caused by inflammation. Drinking adequate amounts of water can flush out the toxins that create inflammation in our body. Drink a minimum of 64 ounces of water per day.

## Relax!

Many of us experience day to day stress, e.g. financial pressures, health problems or work demands. Managing your stress is important. Prolonged stress can become chronic and lead to muscle tension that causes neck or back pain. Common ways to manage stress are exercise, yoga, meditation, talking to a counselor, massage therapy and learning to set limits and say 'no.'