

5 Reasons Your Low Back Hurts

Low back pain plagues too many people in the world. Some people know exactly why they hurt while others have no idea. Here are 5 reasons why your low back may be in pain. While the list could have been much bigger, these are the 5 things I have seen that cause people problems. Even if you don't have low back pain, avoiding these 5 things would be advised.

1. Too much twisting - People assume that twisting from the lower back is normal and "ok." We all twist from time to time, but its important to understand that the lumbar spine is not supposed to twist excessively. Twisting motions should be focused around the thoracic spine (upper back) and not the lumbar. Most people have this wrong.

2. Too much bending (forward flexion) - Bending at the lower back is not advised in most cases. Instead, people should learn to use their hips to "bend over." In other words, by flexing the hips, and keeping the lower back straight, you will use your hips and legs to bend and also to lift. Some bending is going to occur, but it should be kept to a minimum and the hips and legs should always be used to help.

3. Weak Core - The weaker the muscles are that make up your core (i.e. all abdominals, low back, glutes) the more susceptible your lower back will be to pain and problems. A strong core helps to stabilize the lumbar spine and keeps it from doing bad things.

4. Improper Lifting techniques - Whether lifting weights in the gym, or lifting things around the house, you have heard the advice "lift with your legs, not with your back!" Great advice, but most people do not follow it. When you are in the gym and lifting any kind of weight, you always want to keep the low back straight. Using your hips to bend, and your legs to lift is the right way to go. This includes returning the weight back to the floor or rack. I see people have excellent form during their set, but when finished, they bend over at the lower back and return the weight back to the floor.

One of the worst things you can do is lifting things with your lower back and adding a twist as you do so. I had a new mother come to see me recently about her severe lower back pain. When I asked her how she was lifting her baby, she showed me that she had been lifting the baby, in the car seat with her low back and twisting as she brought the baby and the seat from the floor to her. This was killing her back. The compression forces combined with the twisting placed tremendous stresses on her lumbar spine. I advised her to lift with her legs and always try to keep the baby straight in line with her...in other words, no more twisting if possible.

5. Bad "resting" posture - Whether sitting wrong in a chair or sleeping in a bad position, people can and do "kill" their lower back just from resting.

When sitting, make sure there is enough lumbar support. Just like standing, if your back is arched, or bent too far forward, you are placing abnormal stresses on your lower back. Many people just slump into a position in a chair and stay there for hours at a time. When at work, get up every 20 minutes and walk around. This will keep your back from tightening up and helps to minimize stress.

When sleeping, sleep on your back or on your side. Stomach sleeping is not advised. Sleeping on your stomach is never good for your back. If you do sleep face down, try to get out of that sleeping "habit" as soon as possible. Your back will thank you for it. Just remember, if you are placing your body in a bad position for 6-8 hours at a time, you are setting yourself up for a lot of stress and pain the next day.