

Keeping Good Posture

1. Don't get bent out of shape

If you're bent on maintaining a healthier back, following these common sense work habits can help keep injury away.

- When sitting, keep your upper back and neck comfortably straight with your back firmly against the chair.
- Make sure your chair is right for you — adjust the height, tilt, armrests and backrest.
- Take a 30 second timeout every 15 minutes or so to stretch, move or relax.
- Try standing up when you answer the phone, to stretch and change positions.
- Limit the time you spend carrying heavy briefcases, purses and bags.
- Consider increasing the amount of exercise you get to help improve your physical condition.

Source: Mayo Foundation for Education and Research

2. Think before you lift

Lifting is strenuous — and your back will let you know if you've done it incorrectly. To avoid back pain and injury, think about these five approaches before you lift:

- Get as close to the load as possible — as if you're hugging the object.
- Keep yourself in an upright position while squatting to pick up the object.
- Tighten your stomach muscles to help support your spine.
- Use your legs, the strongest muscles in your body.
- Turn with your feet, not twisting your back.

When you put your mind to it, you can avoid back injury when you follow these simple lifting techniques.

Source: National Institutes of Health

3. Easy does it with back pain

It's a widely-held, mistaken belief that you need to rest and avoid activity for a long time if you have back pain. Long-term bed rest is in fact not recommended. Staying in bed more than a day or two can make back pain worse. Here are a few tips to consider if you have back pain:

- Stop activity only for a few days.
- Apply ice or heat to the area. Ice first for 48 to 72 hours. Apply heat after that.
- Take over-the-counter pain medicine.
- Do not do any heavy lifting or twisting for the first six weeks after pain begins.
- After two to three weeks you can start regular activities including exercise. Always check with your doctor before beginning any program of physical activity.

Sources: National Institute of Health; North American Spine Society

4. Care for Your Back

Back pain can also be a sign of other health issues, including arthritis, pregnancy, kidney stones, infections, tumors and stress. That's why you should consider seeing your doctor if your back pain is severe or doesn't get better after three days. You should also seek medical care if you have the following:

- Numbness or tingling anywhere in your body
- Bad pain that does not get better with rest
- Pain after a fall or injury
- Pain plus any of these signs:
 - Trouble going to the bathroom
 - Weakness
 - Fever
 - Weight loss

Sources: National Institute of Health; North American Spine Society