

# Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

## Back Pain: Safe, Effective Conservative Treatment

**At some point,** nearly everyone gets hit with back pain, especially lower-back pain. Such pain can feel sharp. Or it can be a dull ache with tingling, burning, or numbness. Back pain is the second-most common reason for a trip to a doctor and one of the major contributors to disability worldwide.

Many non-chiropractic health care professionals recognize the value of chiropractic back pain treatment. In a *Journal of the American Medical Association* article published in 2013,<sup>1</sup> the

authors suggested chiropractic for low-back pain. Surgery was mentioned as an option *only* if all else fails.

In another highly respected medical journal, manual manipulation was shown to beat medication for short-term relief of chronic back pain.<sup>2</sup>

With prescription pain drug abuse now classified as an epidemic<sup>3</sup> in the United States and the number of spinal fusions soaring 500 percent over the last decade,<sup>4</sup> the essential services provided by doctors of chiropractic (DCs) represent a primary care approach for the prevention, diagnosis and conservative management of back pain and spinal disorders that can often enable patients to reduce or avoid the need for these riskier treatments.

### But Doesn't Back Pain Simply Disappear by Itself?

Researchers used to believe that back pain would heal on its own. Minor back injuries do often go away on their own within a day or two. But although back pain may disappear temporarily, it is relatively likely to return. It has been demonstrated that more than 33 percent of people who experience low-back pain find that it lasts longer than 30 days.<sup>5</sup>

If your back pain is not resolving quickly, it may be the result of mechanical problems that a doctor of chiropractic can address. Many chiropractic patients with long-lasting or recurring back pain feel improvement shortly after starting chiropractic treatment.<sup>6</sup>

### Other Causes of Back Pain

Back pain, however, does not necessarily result from straining the back with too much weekend basketball or golf or gardening. It can also be caused by arthritis, obesity, psychological stress, diseases of internal organs that may include kidney stones, kidney infections, blood clots, or bone loss.

Back pain can also last longer than expected when a patient, fearing further injury, cuts back on physical activity.



### How We Harm Our Backs

Many factors negatively affect our backs, including poor posture; improper lifting, reaching and twisting; too much sitting, or occupations that are known to be particularly hard on backs. Nursing home workers, delivery drivers, farmers, firefighters/EMTs, landscapers, and construction workers may strain their backs by lifting heavy objects or people.

Auto mechanics and shingle roofers frequently twist their spines into physically awkward positions.

Police officers strain their backs by sitting in their cars for prolonged periods, followed by bursts of often strenuous activity.

Heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers often compress their spines by sitting in one position in a vibrating vehicle for hours at a stretch. This can lead to disc degeneration.

### References

1. Goodman DM, Burke AE, Livingston EH. Low Back Pain JAMA. 2013;309(16):1738. doi:10.1001/jama.2013.3046.
2. Giles L, Muller R. Chronic spinal pain: A randomized clinical trial comparing medication, acupuncture, and spinal manipulation. Spine 2003 July 15;28(14):1490-1502.
3. *Unintentional Drug Poisoning in the United States*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010. *Prescription Drug Abuse*. White House Office on National Drug Policy. Accessed November 2013.
4. Whoriskey, Keating. *Boom in spinal fusions questioned*. Washington Post. Page 1. October 28, 2013; *Rise in spinal fusion surgeries driven partly by financial incentives*. Washington Post. November 13, 2013.
5. Hestbaek L, Leboeuf-Yde C, Engberg M, Lauritzen T, Bruun NH, Manniche C. The course of low-back pain in a general population. Results from a 5-year prospective study. J Manipulative Physiol Ther 2003 May; 26(4):213-9.
6. Stig LC, Nilsson O, Leboeuf-Yde C. Recovery pattern of patients treated with chiropractic spinal manipulative therapy for long-lasting or recurrent low-back pain. J Manipulative Physiol Ther 2001 May;24(4):288-91.

### Back Pain Prevention

- Maintaining a healthy diet allows the spine to receive the nutrients it requires for good health. There's nothing wrong with eating snack or junk foods occasionally. Problems arise, however, when we turn to such foods frequently. The calorie load from snack foods tends to be high and the nutrient value is either low or nonexistent.
- If you still smoke, look into quitting. Smoking impairs blood flow. When blood flow is impaired, that keeps oxygen and nutrients from reaching the tissues of the spine.
- The typical American lifestyle is far too sedentary. Our backs benefit when we take a break from sitting to walk around or exercise. Try taking 100 brisk steps every hour on the hour.
- Good ergonomics at the workstation helps the back. Many people hunch over their keyboards or reach for the mouse in a way that stresses the shoulder, neck and/or back. The mouse should always sit only a couple of inches from the keyboard.
- Remember to warm up before indulging in physical activities like gardening or exercising.
- When lifting something, bend the knees and keep the object close to the body. Above all, do not twist the body while lifting.
- When moving a heavy object, don't pull. Push, instead.
- Let comfort be your guide when choosing the shoes you wear all day. Low-heeled shoes are best for posture and the back.
- When shopping for a mattress, look for one that's of medium firmness to give your spine the proper support.
- A program of regular exercise will help to prepare the back and your muscles to respond in healthy, pain-free ways.



For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, visit ACA's website at [www.acatoday.org/patients](http://www.acatoday.org/patients).

FIVE POINTS  
**CHIROPRACTIC**  
WELLNESS CENTER

This patient information page is a public service of the American Chiropractic Association. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for a diagnosis by a specialist. For specific information concerning your health condition, consult your doctor of chiropractic. This page may be reproduced noncommercially by doctors of chiropractic and other healthcare professionals to educate patients. Any other reproduction is subject to ACA approval.