Back Injury Prevention

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Experts estimate that a startling 85 percent of adults under the age of 50 have had back pain. Back pain is the most common cause of disability, and ranks second as the most common reason for missed work days. However, most back pain can be prevented.

TIPS TO A HEALTHY BACK

Start Now —While time and gravity might have caused some unwanted structural changes, most people could use better posture while standing, sitting, and moving.

Flexibility — Practicing flexibility training will maintain your spine's flexibility and provide the necessary strength to prevent those unwanted changes. Stretching tight arm and leg muscles will also help maintain the proper strength and flexibility of your spine.

Core Strengthening — Progressively strengthen the abdominal or core muscles to provide the structural support for a stable back. Don't forget the smaller spinal muscles running the length of your spine or the large hip muscles.

Healthy Lifestyle Choices — Eliminate risk factors (stop smoking, lose weight, reduce stress and anxiety) and commit to improving your fitness level. Aerobic, endurance, and resistance exercise training are all effective in reducing not only weight, but also anxiety and depression.

Body Mechanics — Maintain the most efficient position and use of your body during a given activity. Practice using the "neutral spine" position (the position of your spine that provides the most comfortable position while maintaining the natural curves when you stand, lift, exercise, and work). Remember, your back responds to the strain you place on it, and while you often remember to rest a tired arm, do you also remember to rest your back if you are stuck in an awkward position while painting, working on your car, or reaching for an item on the top shelf?

BODY MECHANIC BASICS

Sit with Support — Most consider sitting a "non-activity," but your spine is actively supporting you. Select chairs that offer support, especially for the low back (or consider using a towel or small roll in the lumbar or lower back area), and use armrests.

Maintain good posture throughout any activity and take a break during sustained activities.

Lift with the large muscles of your arms and legs — Keep a wide base of support (with your feet at least shoulder width apart), and bend at your hip instead of the back. Squat or half-kneel to stand when lifting objects from the floor.

Test the weight of any heavy object.

Get help lifting when needed.

When moving heavy objects, keep them close to your body.

Pivot, do not twist, when moving.

Push (and stay close to the object) instead of pulling.

Use both sides of your body whenever possible — Stabilize with one arm while reaching with the other. For example, place one hand on the bed while reaching across for the pillow on the other side.

Finding the Right Mechanic

If you have back pain, Eisenhower's physical therapists are experts in resolving back pain and establishing a specific back care program tailored to your needs.

Physical therapists provide a full range of treatment options (including heat/cold, ultrasound, electrical stimulation, traction) and manual therapy to reduce pain, restore mobility and strength, and will prescribe the right exercises, at the right level, to keep you challenged and on track to a healthy back.

For more information, please call the Eisenhower Physical Therapy department at 760-773-2033.

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