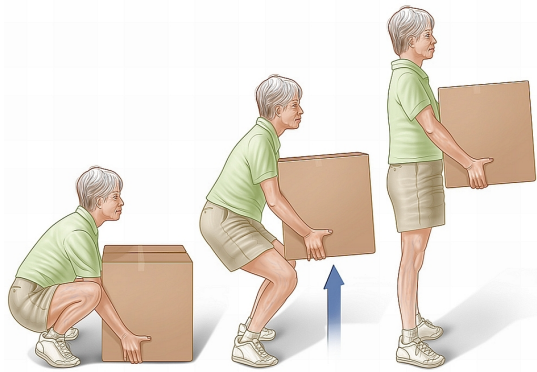


Back Pain: How to Protect Your Back



Almost everyone has low back pain at one time or another. It is often caused by overuse, strain, or injury. Aging can play a part too, because your bones and muscles tend to lose strength as you age. But often, we bring on our back pain by not using our bodies carefully.

You can reduce your risk for low back pain by learning some simple tips about good posture and body mechanics.

Why is it important to watch your posture and body mechanics?

Body mechanics are the way you use your body. Posture is the way you sit or stand. In many cases, low back pain is the result of poor body mechanics or bad posture. Slouching or using your back incorrectly when lifting can lead to back pain.

Basics of good posture

Good posture maintains the three front-to-back curves that give the spine an "S" shape. These curves help absorb stress and impact on your body. Good posture is the same, whether you are sitting or standing.

- Stand or sit tall without slumping or arching your back too much.
- When you sit, relax your shoulders, keep your feet flat on the floor, and avoid leaning forward.
- Do not slouch or slump. Slouching or slumping may seem more relaxing, but when you lose the normal curves of a neutral spine, you actually put more stress on your body.
- Change positions or get up and take a short walk as much as you can. Any position is uncomfortable after a while.

Use good body mechanics

Lifting

- Keep the object close to you.
- Bend your knees and flex from your hips. Do not let your spine slump as you grasp the object. Then straighten your knees to lift it up.
- Set down your load carefully, squatting with your knees.
- Do not try to lift something by yourself that is too heavy, too awkward to carry, or that will not allow you to see where you are walking.

Pushing and pulling

- Choose pushing over pulling. Pushing is easier on your back.
- Avoid pulling whenever possible.

Bending and turning

- If you need to bend down for something, try to squat and flex from your hips instead. Bending and slumping are hard on your back.
- Turn your whole body instead of twisting at the waist.
- Do not bend and twist at the same time.

Sleeping positions and getting out of bed

Sleep on your side if possible. Place a pillow between your knees when you sleep on your side. If you sleep on your back, place a pillow under your knees.

To rise from bed:

- Roll onto your side and bend both knees.
- Drop your feet over the side of the bed as you push with both arms to sit up.
- Scoot to the edge of the bed and straighten your legs to stand.

Sitting and standing

- Try placing a small pillow, a rolled-up towel, or a lumbar roll in the curve of your back for extra support.
- Sit in a chair that is low enough that you can place both feet flat on the floor with your knees level with your hips. If your chair or desk is too high, use a foot rest to raise your legs.
- Before you stand up, shift to the front of your chair. Then stand.
- Do not sit or stand for long periods. Take regular breaks to walk around and stretch.