

June 2014
(6th month)

Back on TRACK

Lower back pain is a very common problem but there are effective ways to reduce your risk of developing the condition.

When you sit, cook, lift a child or carry a backpack, you probably don't think about your back, even though it is your body's scaffolding structure and supports your head and neck, shoulders, arms, pelvis and rib cage.

Your back houses a spinal column that keeps you upright and threads down around 30 connecting bones, or vertebrae, which are cushioned by spongy discs and attached to muscles, tendons and ligaments. Over time, injury-related issues or constant strain can lead to annoying twinges, chronic aches or pain that interferes with everyday activities.

"Between 70 and 80 per cent of people will experience back pain at some time in their lives," says back expert [redacted] a Sydney physiotherapist who helps about 1,400 people each week with her classes for back pain.

Weight gain can be a common trigger for lower back pain, as can poor posture, footwear and lifting technique.

Stand up straight

Be aware of your posture throughout the day. "When standing, keep your weight evenly balanced between both feet and your shoulders back without being strained," says [redacted]. "When sitting, keep your shoulders back in line with

hips, put feet flat on the floor or on a foot stool and put a small pillow or support behind your back to support your lumbar."

Meanwhile, reduce what you carry. "This is particularly important for backpacks and big shoulder bags, which can contribute to slumped posture and lower back pain if too heavy," she adds.

Best foot forward

"High heels tilt your pelvis forward, throw your centre of gravity out of alignment and force your back muscles to work harder to maintain stability," says Brenden Brown, spokesperson for the Australian Podiatry Council.

If you have lower back pain women should choose a shoe with a wide, flat heel of no higher than 2.5 centimetres and men should avoid wearing loafers and thongs. "Lower back pain can also be treated in some people by addressing poor foot posture with orthotic supports in shoes," Brown says.

Peak shape

Studies show that people who regularly work out suffer less back pain, however, choose carefully - while running may increase risk of back pain for some people, swimming usually helps to ease it by supporting your back as you exercise. The back-friendly approach?

We can help

Don't let the cost put you off seeking treatment for persistent back pain.

[redacted] members with extras cover can access one fully covered initial consultation for eligible musculoskeletal conditions each year, whether it's for a new health problem or a flare up of an old one. The consultation includes a diagnosis and treatment plan and is delivered through participating physiotherapists, chiropractors and osteopaths, subject to your annual limits.

For more information call [redacted] visit [redacted]

drop by your nearest branch.

Cross-training. Engage in a variety of exercise such as aerobics, walking and weight training, as well as yoga and tai chi for flexibility and balance.

"Speak to a personal trainer or physiotherapist for advice on good exercise technique," advises Dr Ben Rattray, Associate Professor in Sports Studies at the University of Canberra. "For example, strengthening your gluteals in your bottom or the muscles at the back of the hip or inside of the legs can help stop an alignment issue, such as leaning your knees in when you walk or jog, which can throw your whole back out."

Back up

Suffering a twinge, ache or stabbing pain in your lower back? Try:

- cold packs, then hot packs
- over-the-counter analgesics (paracetamol) or anti-inflammatories (ibuprofen)
- staying mobile rather than in bed, while avoiding activities that worsen the pain.

If the pain persists, see your GP who may prescribe muscle relaxants and order X-rays or other tests.

1,400 people each week