

Mind your spine: Steps for long-term back wellness

Novant Health Employer Solutions

Back pain is a common problem. The back is a complicated structure of muscles, nerves, discs and the bones of your spinal column. You can easily injure your back if you have poor posture or if you move the wrong way.

Here are some things you can do to keep your back healthy and lessen your chance of having back problems.

- **Exercise regularly.** Mix exercise that gets your heart rate up – like walking, biking or swimming – with stretching and strengthening. Do not forget about strengthening the core muscle groups such as your abdominal muscles and back muscles.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight puts more pressure on the structures in your back.
- **Avoid smoking.** Along with many other reasons why smoking is bad for you, it also lessens the blood supply to the discs in between your spinal bones. It can also delay healing if you need treatment.
- **Use good posture.** When you stand, have your ears, shoulders, hips and ankles in line with each other. Keep your feet shoulder width apart. Stagger your feet or put one foot up on a small ledge or stool if you stand for a long time.

When you sit, use adjustable office chairs that turn and have a curved support for your lower back. Keep your hips and knees both at 90-degree angles. Have your feet flat on the floor. At a desk with a computer, have the keyboard right in front of you and the monitor just below eye level. Keep your forearms at 90 degrees or tilted slightly up. Do not let your wrists rest on the desk.

When you lift or move objects, do it correctly. Strong abdominal muscles help to provide support to the back. Always tighten abdominal and buttock muscles before lifting.

To move objects, always PUSH rather than pull, if you can. Push, pull, slide or roll an object rather than lift if possible. Avoid twisting. Take small steps with your feet instead. Try to get the object close to the center of your body.

Sleep with your spine in a good position.

Back sleepers: Put a small, rolled-up towel or lumbar support under your lower back. You also may want to put a pillow under your knees.

Side sleepers: Put a pillow in between your legs. This will keep good alignment with your spine and hips and prevent stress.

For more information, call **336-277-3431**
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