

# Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

## Back Pain and Chiropractic

Walking upright on two feet has advantages, but it also puts intense pressure on the spine, as well as on other muscles and bones. Add to this improper sitting, lifting, or reaching—and the normal wear and tear of working and playing—and you have the perfect recipe for back pain. That's why back pain is the 2nd most common reason for visits to the doctor's office, outnumbered only by upper-respiratory infections. In fact, some experts say, as many as 80% of us will experience a back problem at some time in our lives.<sup>1</sup>

Back injuries are a part of everyday life. They can cause a sharp pain or a dull ache and can be accompanied by a tingling, numbness, or burning sensation. You may also feel weakness, pain, or tingling in your pelvis and upper leg—a condition known as sciatica. The spine is quite good at dealing with back injuries. Minor injuries usually heal within a day or 2. Some pain, however, continues. What makes it last longer is not entirely understood, but researchers suspect that stress, mood changes, and the fear of further injury may prevent patients from being active and exacerbate the pain.

### Tips for Back Pain Prevention:

- Maintain a healthy diet and weight.
- Remain active—under the supervision of your doctor of chiropractic.
- Avoid prolonged inactivity or bed rest.
- Warm up or stretch before exercising or other physical activities, such as gardening.
- Maintain proper posture.
- Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.
- Sleep on a mattress of medium firmness to minimize any curve in your spine.
- Lift with your knees, keep the object close to your body, and do not twist when lifting.

- Quit smoking. Smoking impairs blood flow, resulting in oxygen and nutrient deprivation to spinal tissues.
- Work with your doctor of chiropractic to ensure that your workstation is ergonomically correct.

### Chiropractic Treatment for Back Pain

If you experience back pain, consult your doctor of chiropractic. More than 30 million Americans sought chiropractic care last year alone. Past studies have indicated that consumers are very happy with the chiropractic care they receive.

With a thorough knowledge of the structure and functioning of the human body, doctors of chiropractic make diagnoses and take steps to correct problems using spinal adjustments, dietary and lifestyle advice, and other natural tools.

Spinal manipulation—the primary form of treatment performed by doctors of chiropractic—is a recommended option for back pain treatment, rated as such by many state and workers' compensation guidelines. Research has shown that manipulative therapy and spinal manipulation are not only safe and effective, but can cut costs and get workers back on the job faster than other treatments. A recent medical study has also pointed out that manual manipulation offers better short-term relief of chronic back pain than medication.<sup>2</sup>

### Top 10 Most “Back Breaking” Jobs

In a recent informal survey, the following occupations were found to cause the most stress and strains on the muscles of the back.

**10. Auto mechanics** work in physically awkward positions all day long—bending over cars, sliding under cars, etc.

**9. Nursing home workers** have to lift elderly people into and out of bed. The workers' bodies can become twisted and off-center.

**8. Delivery drivers** are always running, often carrying heavy and awkward packages. Packages shipped via UPS, FedEx, etc., have increased in weight over the years. The job also involves a lot of driving.

**7. Firefighters/EMTs** deal with fire, water pressure from hoses and have to chop obstacles with an axe. They often carry people to safety, which is particularly difficult if the victim is obese or incapacitated.

**6. Shingle roofers** are always twisting their bodies.

**5. Farmers** lift heavy equipment and bags of feed and grain. When doing fieldwork, they have to constantly turn backward to watch equipment that is pulled behind a tractor.

**4. Police officers** sit in their cars for long periods of time, which is rough on the lower back. When called into action, they have to make sudden movements and often face resistance from those they are arresting. Police officers also wear belts that can weigh up to 40 pounds, which can cause chronic back pain.

**3. Landscapers** lift heavier objects than any other profession. Wheelbarrows can twist and turn, wrenching the workers' backs.

**2. Construction workers'** jobs can involve hammering, lifting, steelwork, or ironwork—all in very awkward positions. Moving steel beams can wreak havoc on the entire body.

**1. Heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers** endure constant compression and vibration from trucks. This can damage the back. Prolonged sitting puts pressure on the spine, which can result in disc degeneration. Liquid-carrying trucks are particularly bad. When this type of truck comes to a sudden stop, the fluid in the truck's tank slams back and forth, and the driver feels the impact. Also, because professional truck drivers are always on the road, their diets are seldom what they should be, which can contribute to back problems. ■

### When choosing a doctor of chiropractic:

- Be sure the chiropractor has attended an accredited chiropractic college.
- Make sure the chiropractor is licensed to practice in your state. After graduating from an accredited chiropractic college, doctors of chiropractic must pass rigorous state and national board exams before they can practice.
- Talk to your friends, family, and co-workers. The best referrals often come from satisfied patients.
- Talk to the doctor. The chiropractor should be willing to answer your questions and should talk freely with you about your concerns and course of treatment.

### References

1. Vallfors B. Acute, subacute and chronic low back pain: Clinical symptoms, absenteeism and working environment. *Scan J Rehab Med Suppl* 1985;11:1-98.
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.

### ACA American Chiropractic Association

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at [www.aca-today.org](http://www.aca-today.org) or call 800-986-4636.

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