

## Preventing Low Back Pain

If you have never experienced low back pain, you're in the lucky minority, and you would probably like to keep it that way. And if you have experienced low back pain, you know that it's unpleasant and can get in the way of everyday activities. Luckily, there's lots you can do to protect yourself from developing this type of pain. To keep your back happy, stay active, maintain a healthy weight, avoid cigarettes, and learn good body mechanics.

### Lifestyle Changes

**Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.** Excess weight places added strain on the spine and back muscles.

**Exercise regularly and avoid sitting for long periods.** Without proper exercise, the muscles in the back become weak and stiff, which increases the risk of injury.

**Quit smoking.** Smoking makes people more sensitive to pain, and it increases the risk of a bone-weakening disease that can affect the spine. Plus, the nicotine in cigarettes can make it difficult for the spine to get the nutrients it needs.

**Manage stress.** People under stress sometimes unconsciously tighten their back muscles, which can lead to pain.

**Modify activities that can lead to back pain.** Consider which activities might be causing your pain. Some people may find that carrying a small child can bring on pain, and they may have to learn proper carrying techniques. Others may find that sitting at their computer all day causes discomfort, and they may have to get up to stretch periodically.

**Taking steps to prevent back pain will make a big difference.**

**For support and answers to your questions, call a Health Coach today. If appropriate, a Health Coach will send you a complimentary videotape, such as *Acute Low Back Pain: Managing Your Pain Through Self-Care*.**

### Body Mechanics

**Learn proper lifting techniques.** When lifting something heavy, squat down to get a hold of it, lift by straightening your legs, and keep your back straight. When you're ready to set it down, squat again, and always keep your back straight.

**Practice good posture.** Don't slouch, but don't take on a military pose either, because these positions strain your back. Hold your head high, with your chin parallel to the ground. Keep your shoulders relaxed and in line with your ears, keep your stomach flat, and maintain a slight curve in your lower back. When sitting, lean slightly forward at the hips so that your feet are planted on the ground.

**Sleep in a position that supports your back.** Lie on your side with your knees bent and a pillow between your legs, or on your back with a pillow under your knees.

**Sit with your back supported.** When seated, make sure you have back support and that you can place both feet flat on the floor. If necessary, use a pillow or rolled-up towel for added low back support. In your car, position the seat so that you can comfortably reach the steering wheel with your arms slightly bent.

**Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.** Comfortable shoes can help you maintain good posture and lower the risk of injury.