

BACK CARE

RISK FACTORS CHECKLIST

- I often carry heavy items.
- I am more than 20 % overweight.
- I stand or sit in one position for 30 minutes or more.
- I cradle the phone between my ear and shoulder.
- I sleep on too hard or too soft a mattress.
- I wear improper footwear.
- I perform tasks requiring frequent bending.
- I reach for items above my shoulders.
- I carry or lift children.
- I lift heavy objects off the floor.

(You can easily prevent or reduce some of these risk factors. Other risks are simply a part of your life, but the threat they pose to a healthy back can be minimized.)

You can avoid unnecessary stress on your back if you learn and practice good posture. Every time you practice good posture, you strengthen the large muscles that support your spine. This helps relieve stress on the smaller, less efficient muscles in your back.

Three essential requirements for maintaining a healthy back:

- Stay healthy and maintain the best possible mental and physical condition.
- Exercise to strengthen and stretch back muscles.
- Avoid risk factors for back injury.

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CHANGE YOUR HABITS

- Place objects often used within arm's reach, between knuckle and shoulder height. Avoid reaching across an extended space, and modify work habits that result in unnecessary motions. When reaching overhead, avoid stretching or over-reaching.
- When talking on the phone, use a speakerphone, headset, or shoulder rest, or rearrange your writing position to free one hand. Cradling a telephone receiver between your ear and shoulder causes neck and upper back strain.
- When carrying luggage, shoulder bags, or briefcases, balance the load equally, shift the weight from one side to the other or use a luggage carrier. Heavy shoulder bags and briefcases throw your body off balance. Try lightening your load by carrying only frequently used items.
- Avoid awkward or unbalanced postures, such as standing with all your weight on one leg, sitting with your weight shifted to one side, or crossing your legs at the knees while sitting. Do not slouch!
- Avoid carrying heavy objects, and be sure to get help if the load is too heavy, or too awkward to handle. Use a dolly or hand truck.
- Make sure your mattress provides adequate support. A soft, sagging mattress or a mattress that is too hard does not support the natural curves of the body and may cause back discomfort.
- Know your physical ability and limitations.
- Always get as close as possible to the person or piece of equipment that you are going to lift.
- Keep your arms and the weight you are lifting close to your body to create leverage and help maintain your balance.
- Lift without twisting. Avoid any kind of twisting or swinging motions when lifting.
- Position your feet shoulder's width apart with one foot slightly in front of the other. Do not minimize the importance of proper footwear.
- Communicate clearly and frequently with your partner. Tell the victim what you are going to do before you do it.
- Ensure that enough help is available. Use an even number of people to maintain balance during the lift.
- Use a power grip to get maximum force from the hands. The hands should be positioned a minimum of 10 inches apart. The palms should face up with palms and fingers in complete contact with the lifting apparatus.
- **AVOID BENDING AT THE WAIST.**