

# Back Care Basics

Back injuries are the most common and most expensive workplace injury. On any given day, 6.5 million Americans are under some treatment for back pain, with the total annual bill exceeding \$16 billion. The good news is much of this pain and expense can be avoided if we take some preventative steps. So we've compiled a "top 10" list of ways to keep your back healthy.



1. **Stretch:** Keeping your back muscles flexible will dramatically lower your risk of strain and pain. Back stretches are simple and feel good, too! It's simply taking the time to schedule them in your day. Ask one of our fitness professionals for some good stretching exercises that will work for you.

2. **Lose Weight:** Carrying extra weight, especially around your middle, puts unnatural stress on the lower back. Getting rid of those extra pounds will reduce the strain.

3. **Exercise:** Not only will exercise assist in burning off excess fat, but it will also strengthen your back muscles, making them less susceptible to injury. If you do have back pain, however, make sure you discuss your specific needs with one of our fitness professionals before starting.

4. **Abdominal Strength:** When abdominal muscles are weak your "paunch" may pooch. Strengthening them will help keep your torso straight and the pelvis tilted back, alleviating stress on the lower back.

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5. **Strategic Lifting:** All too often our backs are tweaked when we lift something heavy. If you bend your knees, the strain will be on the quads (front part of upper legs). If you don't, the strain (and sprain) will be on your back.

6. **Watch the High Spots:** Ever go to get something heavy off a high shelf? Standing on your tippy toes, you slowly scoot it out, stretching like crazy to reach it. The next thing you know is you're struggling to hold this heavy object over your head. How does your back feel? Next time, use a ladder or chair.

7. **Watch Your Posture:** Sitting or standing for long periods of time is stressful on your back. Slouching for short periods of time is stressful on your back. Remember, your mother was right – sit and stand up straight.

8. **Walk on the Hour:** When you are confined to a desk for long periods of time, take regular breaks to release the stress on your back. A small pillow is also helpful for back support.

9. **Manage your Stress:** Unbridled stress is universally debilitating. It can be a contributing factor to both

disease and injury. Do yourself and your back a favor by taking time to relax.

10. Take a Bath: A warm bath is rejuvenating both physically and mentally. The warm water will relax your mind, as well as your tight back muscles. So grab your favorite magazine and head for the bath.

Back pain and injury are not inevitable, yet most are preventable. And the best news is that every one of the above recommendations have multiple benefits. For example, exercise will not only lower your risk of back injury, it will also lower your blood pressure, help you lose weight, lower your stress and increase your muscle mass.

So resolve TODAY to take care of your back so you can avoid back pain tomorrow!

***Most back pain is preventable with the right type of exercise and proper body alignment. If you feel you need assistance with proper exercises or posture see a certified personal trainer.***

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*Anyone interested in becoming involved in increased physical activity or changes to their dietary habits should consult their physician prior to making any change*