

Chronic back pain: relief & prevention

Chronic back pain affects more than one in five people and is most common in middle-aged and older adults. Don't let it get the best of you! As persistent as chronic back pain is, you can lessen its effects by making smart lifestyle changes:

» **Tune out tension.** Fight back pain with quiet, calm, relaxing music. A recent study found that people with herniated disks significantly reduced their low-back pain by listening to music and doing relaxation exercises every day.

» **Make your move.** Regular exercise can help speed recovery for many patients with chronic back pain—it helps reduce stress and increases flexibility and strength in the muscles that support your back. To avoid injury, be sure to stretch **before** and **after** a workout.

» **Sit up straight.** Your mom was right. Keep your head and shoulders erect. Stand tall and proud, don't slump and keep abdominal muscles tight.

Sitting the wrong way can also strain your back muscles and ligaments. Make sure your desk and computer keyboard are at comfortable heights so you don't have to hunch forward. If your office chair doesn't support you adequately, use a small pillow behind your lower back. And once an hour, stand up and stretch. Place your hand on your lower back and gently arch backward.

When you drive, pull your seat forward so that the brake, gas pedal and steering wheel are easy to reach. On long trips, stop often to stretch and walk.

» **Rise and shine.** You'll probably spend at least one-third of your life in bed, so you need a mattress firm enough to support your back. If you have to put a board underneath it for support—or if your back hurts when you wake up—it's probably time to get a new mattress.

Don't just pop right up when getting out of bed. Instead, roll onto your side, bend both knees and drop your feet over the side as you push up with both arms to a sitting position. Scoot to the edge of the bed and stand.

» **Talk to your doctor** about other options for back pain management. Remember, chronic back pain doesn't have to control you—you can control it.

The right way to lift

By lifting properly, you can stop stressing your back and joints. Place your feet shoulder-width apart for balance and support, bend your knees, tighten your stomach muscles and let your leg muscles do the work. Do this whenever you scoop something up, whether it's the dog's dish, the bath mat or a grocery bag.

Back pain relief is available!

» **The Northside Hospital Spine Center makes evaluation, diagnosis and treatment of neck and back pain as easy as possible. No physician referral is needed. For more information, call (404) 459-1809 or visit northside.com/spinecenter. Check out the Northside Hospital Healthcast and watch spine and back specialists discuss the latest treatments.**

