

BACK CARE

Exercise

Regular exercise increases your back's flexibility and endurance. You should exercise the muscles that support your back, such as those in the stomach, hips, buttocks, and thighs, especially the abdominal muscles that help to keep your body's weight centered on your spine. Weak abdominal muscles make your back prone to injury. Effective exercises include swimming, walking, biking, or yoga.

Maintain A Healthy Body Weight

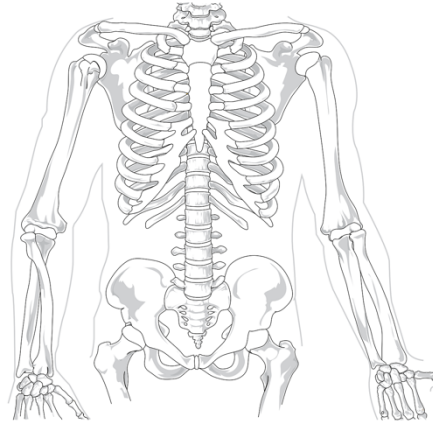
Excess weight puts increased strain on back muscles and ligaments.

Good Posture

Standing: Stand up straight and don't slump your shoulders. When standing for long periods of time, alternate placing your feet on a low footstool to ease your lower back.

Sitting: Sit up straight. Keep your knees slightly higher than your hips and your feet either flat on the floor or on a stool. When choosing a chair, pick one that firmly supports your lower back or place a pillow between your back and the chair to maintain its normal curve. When driving, move your car seat forward so that your knees are bent.

Lifting: When you lift, bend at the knees, not at the waist. Let your leg muscles do most of the work.



To pick up something heavy, squat with your legs apart, tighten your abdominal muscles. Keep your back straight, and hold the object close to your body. Push a heavy object instead of lifting or pulling it. Pulling is more likely to injure your back. If you need to turn to the side, turn by moving your feet and not by twisting your back.

Sleeping: Don't lie on your stomach since that causes the abdominal muscles to sag. Instead, lie on your side with knees bent to relieve pressure on the discs. It is helpful to place a pillow between the knees to help keep stress off the hips and lower spine when sleeping on the side. For the same reason, if you lie on your back, keep your knees slightly bent by putting a pillow under them. While a firmer mattress provides support for the spine at all points, a mattress that is too hard can also cause pain. The important factors when choosing a mattress are personal preference and comfort level.