

Fall Fitness Challenge 2013



10 Tips for a Healthy Back Adapted from: WebMD

You never truly appreciate your back and all it does for you - until it starts to hurt. Then every move brings a symphony of agony, until all you want to do is make your back pain stop.

The bones, muscles, and joints that make up your back are among your body's biggest support systems. When any part of that system is weakened or injured, it becomes harder for your back to bear your weight.



Up to 80% of adults have low back pain at some point in their lives. Instead of resorting to back pain treatment after the damage has already been done, be a little proactive. Practice a few pain prevention strategies today, and you may not be sidelined by back pain tomorrow.

Don't Be a Slouch

When your mother scolded, "Don't slouch!" she was unwittingly giving you good medical advice. Holding your spine in an unnatural position or bending the wrong way can strain the muscles and ligaments that support it, leading to back pain. Maintain a healthy back by practicing good posture. Hold your stomach in, your head straight, and your shoulders and hips in one line. Keep your knees slightly bent and your weight balanced evenly on your feet. Stand up straight! Don't lean forward or backward.

Sit Up Straight

When you sit, raise your chair until you're at a comfortable distance from your desk without having to reach or slouch. Flatten your back and buttocks against the chair, keeping your knees slightly higher than your hips and your shoulders back. Choose a chair with good lumbar support, or put a rolled-up towel behind the small of your back. Sit in the same good posture whether you're working at your desk, watching TV, or driving in your car. If you have to sit for long periods of time, get up every 30 minutes or so to stretch your back.

Take a Load Off

Never try to lift anything that you know is too heavy for you. The only thing you'll accomplish is a sore back. To avoid low back pain later, use the right form when lifting. Kneel down and get close to the item you want to pick up. Tighten your abs so they support and protect your back. Then lift with your legs, not your back, and avoid twisting. Keep the object close to your body while you're carrying it.



Fall Fitness Challenge 2013



Rest Easy

Get rid of your featherbed or waterbed and replace it with a firm mattress that offers plenty of back support. Avoid sleeping on your stomach or back, which can cause back pain. Lying on your side instead takes about 55 pounds of pressure off your back. Prop up your knees with a couple of pillows to reduce the pressure even more.

Strengthen Your Support System

Keep your back strong and limber by exercising it at least two or three times a week. Walk, swim, and do other low-impact exercises. Add some abdominal exercises and weight lifting to strengthen the muscles that support your back. Take 10 to 15 minutes to warm up before each exercise to prevent back injuries. Also try yoga or tai chi to stretch your muscles and improve your balance so you're less likely to injure yourself and cause back pain. If you suffer from back pain, talk to your doctor before you start exercising, since some exercises may not be recommended and can be harmful.

Lose Weight

If you're several pounds heavier than your doctor recommends for your height, losing weight is an important part of pain prevention. Combine exercise with a healthy diet to get down to a lighter frame that will be easier for your back to support.

Bone Up

While you're changing the way you eat to lose weight, add in nutrients that build bones and prevent fractures. Make sure you're getting enough calcium, vitamin D, and phosphorous from a supplement and foods like skim milk, low-fat cheese, and lean chicken.



These easy exercises can help strengthen the muscles of your back:

- Lie on your back with your knees bent. Slowly lift each knee to your chest and hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 10 times on each leg.
- Lie on your back with both knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Squeeze your buttocks and slowly raise your hips into the air. Hold for 5 seconds, and then slowly lower your buttocks back to the floor.
- If you feel any back pain while exercising, stop what you're doing. See your doctor to talk about back pain treatments that will help you feel and function better.



Fall Fitness Challenge 2013



Ditch the Stilettos

Ladies, high heels might make your legs look sleek, but they're murder on your back. Walking around on wobbly heels all day can destabilize your posture and leave you in some serious back pain. Leave the towering heels in your closet and instead wear low (1 inch or less), comfortable shoes that support and cushion each step.

Lighten Your Load

Humans weren't meant to be pack mules. When you leave your house in the morning, only carry what you need. Take a few books out of your backpack and remove all nonessential items from your purse. Carry your bag on both shoulders to even out the load on your back.

Stub Out Your Smokes

Nicotine, in addition to a long list of other health offenses, restricts blood flow to the discs that cushion and support your spine. If you're not going to do it to clear the air and prevent lung disease, then stop smoking to prevent back pain. Need help quitting?

QuitPower is available free of charge for UnitedHealthcare members.

