

HINTS FOR CARE OF LOW-BACK DISORDERS

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This list was developed by the *American Chiropractic Association* many years ago (ACA Form No. LB-3). I still find these useful tips very helpful in guiding patients with their activities of daily living.

Standing Hints

1. Don't stand with your knees "locked" back. Keep knees relaxed, low back flat.
2. To relieve sway back when standing and working, place one foot on a low stool.
3. Avoid standing in the same position for longer than a few minutes. Shift your weight from one foot to the other.
4. Avoid leaning backward. Keep hand in front of your body and lean slightly forward.
5. Don't stoop forward unless you also bend your knees. Avoid such positions as in making beds or running the vacuum cleaner when your back aches.

Walking Hints

6. Avoid hard heels and high heels. Hard heels fail to offer shock absorption. High heels tilt the pelvis forward and place a strain on the back.
7. Carefully judge the height of curbs, steps, and landings before stepping up or down.
8. Open doors wide enough to that you can walk through without twisting.
9. As in military right-face and left-face first and then the body when turning to walk from a standing position.
10. At home or work, sit in a straight chair with a firm back. Avoid low or soft overstuffed chairs.

Sitting Hints

11. Sit with your spine firmly supported by the chair, with your knees level or slightly higher than your hips; a footstool or ottoman may help.
12. Avoid sitting in the same position for prolonged periods. Arise frequently and move around the room.
13. Avoid sitting in swivel chairs, chairs on rollers, or chairs that may top easily.
14. Get in and out of car with back straight--do not stoop.

Driving and Passenger Hints

15. Car seat should be firm and positioned so the driver can operate the pedals with knees slightly bent.
16. Always fasten safety belt and shoulder harness.
17. On long drivers, stop occasionally, get out of car, stretch, and move around.
18. A small pillow placed between the lower back and the vertical seat may ease back discomfort.
19. As a passenger, do not sit with legs straight out; keep knees bent, thighs level. Passengers with short legs may need to travel on long trips with feet on a low support such as a 3" box or pillow.

Lifting Hints

20. Size up the object to be lifted. Decide how best to get a good grip on it with balanced distribution.
21. Plant your feet solidly about 12" apart. Squat down close to the object, bending the knees, but keeping the back straight.
22. Lift with the large muscles of your legs, thighs, shoulders and arms--NOT with your spine--even when picking a pencil from the floor.
23. Keep the lifting load close to the body and lift with rhythm. Lift carefully. Lift slowly.
24. Avoid lifting from a bending forward position with your legs straight such as lifting objects from car trunks, placing a baby in a crib, or reaching over furniture to open and close windows.
25. For bulky, awkward or extra heavy loads, get help or use a mechanical device.
26. When help is at hand, decide what each person is to do in advance so that one is not caught with a sudden, unexpected load to bear.
27. Be sure you can see where you are going. Have clear vision over the load. Keep floors clear of tripping and falling hazards.

Sleeping Hints

28. Use a firm mattress; a well-designed mattress is now available in most parts of the country. A ¾" plywood board between mattress and box springs will firm up a soft mattress. Use a king-size bed or sleep alone.
29. Try to sleep on your back or your side. When sleeping on your back, a pillow under your thighs is often helpful. When sleeping on your side, you may be more comfortable with one or both knees bent with hips flexed. Avoid sleeping on your stomach.
30. Avoid extending your arms above your head when lying in bed. Arms should be relaxed at your side.
31. Avoid twisting the body sharply when turning in bed.
32. To arise, turn to non-symptomatic side, draw up knees, push yourself to a sitting position and place feet on floor, stand straight up by keeping the back straight and vertical.

Climate Hints

33. Avoid air-conditioned buildings and drafts while you are perspiring. Except on very warm days, wear protective clothing to keep your perspiring body from getting chilled.
34. The weekend athlete or sportsman should take along extra clothing to avoid getting chilled with temperature lowers in late day. A professional baseball pitcher will always put on a warm-up jacket immediately after leaving the mound.

Exercise Hints (Maintenance and Preventive)

35. When your back pain is relieved, regular exercise within your ability and tolerance may be recommended.
36. A little exercise every day is better than a lot on the weekend. Start exercising slowly, giving your muscles time to "warm up". Don't push yourself into exercising more than you can tolerate comfortably.
37. To warm up before garden work or a sports activity, swing a garden tool (tennis racket, golf club) around and back and forth in different positions, gradually working up to your full range of motion.

General Hints

38. A prolonged hot tub bath just before retiring can be relaxing for a strained back. Enter tepid water and slowly increase temperature to tolerance. Avoid chilling before entering bed.
39. Avoid being overweight and constipation.
40. Avoid physical and emotional stress and fatigue.

IMPORTANT: If back symptoms persist or return, do not wait for the condition to become more severe. Preventive and maintenance care are often very important once the pain has been eliminated.