

HEALTHY BACKS – Reducing lower back pain

Back pain and injuries are among the most common causes of lost workdays and long-term disability. About 80 percent of adults suffer from back pain at some time in their lives, and hundreds of thousands of workers suffer disabling back injuries on the job every year.

The key to preventing lower back injury and pain, whether work-related or not, is physical conditioning. Paying specific attention to exercising the core muscles (those of the spine and the abdomen that are responsible for stabilizing the spine), is critical for developing healthy and pain-free backs. According to a recent report in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, exercise that strengthens the back muscles is one of the most effective remedies for chronic back pain.

Some people have strong, flexible back muscles. Others have muscles that could best be described as weak and stiff. Can you guess who's more likely to end up in agony after bending over to pick up the trash? Some back injuries and pain is preventable. Incorrect lifting, bending or twisting as well as excess weight, poor posture and lack of exercise can be contributing factors.

So when the back's abused, the consequences can be serious and sometimes incapacitating. One wrong move can be a very painful mistake, and long-term stresses and strains on the back can cause deterioration, chronic pain, and disability.

While anyone can suffer from back pain, people who get regular exercise have a distinct advantage over everyone else. The strength and flexibility that comes from exercising regularly offers powerful protection against strained or sprained muscles and ligaments, the number-one cause of back pain. Working out can also help improve posture and increase bone density—that's enough to make even a stomach crunch sound appealing!

When you think about it, it's not surprising that there are so many back injuries. Just look at the back's unique structure and role. The back is made up of a complicated network of muscles and bones that literally hold up the body and control much of a person's daily movements.

Stuart McGill, a world-renowned lecturer and expert in spine function and injury prevention and rehabilitation at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, agrees that **stabilizing the spine** is the answer to a healthy pain free back. He states "The way to achieve and maintain spinal stability is to safely exercise the spine's major stabilizing muscles". These include the back extensor and the deep abdominal muscles. These exercises must all be done safely and under supervision to spare straining the back.

Your medical doctor, physiotherapist, chiropractor and a certified trainer with experience in spinal stabilization exercises can all be helpful in obtaining a healthy back.

*City Centre Health and Fitness have teamed with Sports Physiotherapy to offers a ne w
Healthy Backs program. For more information contact City Centre Fitness, 301, 399
Main St. 250-487-1481*