

How to avoid an aching back

Not many low back problems are related to injuries or disease. The main culprit? Weak and strained muscles.

Most adults will suffer from low back pain at some point. And it is not surprising when you consider how hard your back works: lifting, bending, and performing dozens of other tasks each day. Here is how to keep your back healthy—and pain-free—day in and day out.

The good news about low back pain is that it is usually gone within several days or weeks. The bad news is that it tends to recur, especially if you do not adopt healthy back habits. The secret to

a pain-free back is simple: take good care of your back, and it will take good care of you.

Sit up straight

Make sure your home and office chairs support your lower back. Keep your feet flat on the floor. Avoid slouching or leaning forward to read your computer screen. Take a break or change positions every 30 minutes or so.

Lift wisely

Whether you are picking up a child or a bag of groceries, remember the following advice:

- Stand right in front of whatever you are lifting.
- Place your feet slightly apart to give yourself a stable base.
- Tighten your stomach muscles.
- Bend your knees, keeping your back straight.
- Hold the weight close to your body.
- Avoid twisting as you lift.

Stay active

Aerobic physical activity of any kind—walking, jogging, swimming or biking—reduces back pain and lessens your chance for a repeat backache. Regularly perform routines to strengthen and stretch your back, stomach, hip and thigh muscles. All these muscles support your back.

Do not let back pain get you down. If you experience low back pain despite these measures, experts suggest several self-care strategies:

- Talk with your health care provider about pain relievers, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.
- Apply a heat wrap around your lower torso.
- Try not to bend over first thing in the morning when the risk of injury to your spinal discs may be the highest.

Swimming, cycling, jogging, skiing, aerobic dancing, walking and dozens of any other activities can do more than help your back. These activities can help your overall health. Whether it is a structured exercise program or just part of your daily routine, all exercise adds up to a healthier you.



Samaritan exercise tip

Have you been inactive for a long time? Are you overweight? Do you have a high risk of coronary heart disease or other chronic health problems? Before you start exercising, it is important that you see your health care provider for a medical evaluation first.