

# 24 tips for a healthy spine

- 1 Exercise Regularly:** Spinal tissue repair and remodeling are influenced by the stresses placed upon them. Regular exercise and strengthening activities will promote a healthier, stronger and more stable spine. Exercise does not have to be overly strenuous to achieve significant benefits. A regular activity such as a daily walk can make a significant difference. Always begin an exercise program slowly and carefully to give your muscles a chance to warm up and loosen. It is also a good idea to check with your chiropractor prior to engaging in an exercise program.
- 2 Eat Well:** Proper nutrition will support spine development and repair. A proper diet will also help to strengthen spinal tissues thus reducing the risk for injury.
- 3 Maintain Good Posture:** Always maintain efficient and supportive postures while lying, sitting, and standing to reduce the strain on spinal tissues, as well as to reduce the risk of spinal injury and to promote spine health.
- 4 Invest in a Good Pillow and Mattress:** The average individual spends approximately one third of life sleeping, therefore; proper support of the spine and head during this period will strongly influence spine health. A good pillow and mattress will also facilitate more restorative sleep. A good mattress will support the spine no matter how many times one moves during the night.
- 5 Maintain Spine Flexibility:** Regular activity and stretching helps maintain flexibility of the spine; flexibility which is important to reduce the risk of injury. Again it is also a good idea to check with your chiropractor prior to engaging in a stretching program.
- 6 Balanced Carrying:** Always attempt to carry items over 4 kgs in a balanced fashion, dispersing the weight as evenly as possible from right to left. Do not overload your luggage, backpack or handbag.
- 7 Take Periodic Breaks:** Avoid sustained positions. During episodes of prolonged sitting or standing, periodically take a break, stretch your legs and back. Periodic stretching will help to keep you from tightening up and injuring the spine.
- 8 Use Proper Phone Technique and Equipment:** Avoid cradling the phone between the neck and the shoulder. Use a headset if prolonged phone use is required at home or at work which will allow you to maintain a neutral head and neck position.
- 9 Sleep on Your Back or Side:** Do not sleep on your stomach. If you sleep on your side, place a pillow between your knees to reduce rotation of the low back. If you sleep on your side, try to keep your legs bent at the knees and at the hips, a position which reduces the stress on the low back. These positions are generally more supportive of the spine than lying face down (prone).
- 10 Invest in Proper Shoes and Footwear:** The average person takes approximately 5000-8000 steps during the course of a normal day. Proper foot and ankle support will reduce stress upon the knees and hips as well as the back.
- 11 Invest in Good Chairs:** Individuals spend the majority of their lives in a sitting position. Chairs greatly influence sitting posture. Poor chairs may contribute to chronic spinal problems... well designed chairs promote spinal health.
- 12 Use Proper Lifting Techniques:** Proper lifting technique will reduce the risk for spine injury. Keep the back straight and bend the legs and hips when lifting; this reduces stress on the back. Avoid lifting objects higher than your waist whenever possible. Face the object you wish to lift. When lifting, hold the objects close to the body. Do not twist while lifting. When possible push rather than pull an object which is easier on the back. Seek help lifting when necessary. Lift cautiously with moderate speed.

- 13 Walk Efficiently:** Walking requires the use of over 200 individual muscles. It requires the use of all muscles of the spine and pelvis. Walk erect with your head and neck in a neutral position. Avoid slumping while walking. Avoid high heels and platform shoes. Avoid or reduce excessive back extension (swayback) during walking.
- 14 Avoid Excessive High-Impact Activities:** Each time you strike your foot during walking, running or jumping, the shock of impact is absorbed by the joints of the feet, ankles, legs, hips and low back. Avoid excessive high impact activities. Wear proper footwear to reduce the degree of shock to the spine.
- 15 Think Ergonomically:** Seek the optimum work environment. This requires an adjustable workstation to properly support the extremities and the spine depending upon your height, weight and body type. An efficient work environment will include proper phone equipment, an adjustable chair, an efficient keyboard and adjustable monitor. The work surface should have adjustable height. It will also require proper lighting. A footrest will contribute to reduced stress on the spine. Assume a relaxed yet supported posture.
- 16 Listen to Your Spine:** Avoid positions and activities which contribute to increased back pain or cause back pain radiating down the legs. Avoid those positions which elicit numbness or tingling. If back symptoms should persist or progress, see your chiropractor immediately. If you are involved in an activity that causes or increases back pain, think about what you can change to alleviate the pain. Your body will usually tell you what it needs if you take time to listen to it.
- 17 Maintain Optimum Body Weight.** Excessive bodyweight increases stress upon the tissues of the spine, thereby increasing the risk for abnormal "wear and tear". Excessive body weight also contributes to alteration of the normal curves of the spine which can lead to stress on the spine.
- 18 Avoid Smoking:** Smoking increases the risk for many life threatening conditions. Smoking is a habit which promotes tissue inflammation and impairs the healing process. Smoking contributes to blood vessel disease which can impair blood flow to many parts of the body including the back.
- 19 Drink Plenty of Water:** An adequate amount of water is vital to good health. The musculoskeletal tissues require water to function and to repair themselves.
- 20 Get Enough Sleep:** Sleep is essential to good health, mental alertness, tissue growth and repair. An adequate amount of restful sleep is required to restore the body. This is related to the amount of time spent sleeping and the quality of sleep. Back pain is the most common form of nighttime pain. Many individuals with back pain suffer from fragmented sleep and wake up feeling unrefreshed.
- 21 Increase Abdominal Strength:** The abdominal muscles help support the low back and pelvis. The abdominal muscles surround about 2/3 of the lower part of the body. Strengthening the abdominal muscles will increase spinal stability and reduce the risk for spine injury. Conditioned abdominal muscles will also contribute to more efficient walking. Strong abdominal muscles will fatigue less during prolonged standing or prolonged sitting thereby, protecting the low back.
- 22 Frequently Adjust Your Posture:** Alternate between sitting and standing tasks to reduce stress placed upon the spine. During long periods of standing, rest one foot on a low support, and alternate the feet. When sitting rest both feet on the floor.
- 23 Learn to Relax:** Learn and apply relaxation techniques to manage stress both on the job and off the job. This will help to reduce muscle tension and pain from those muscles.
- 24 Have Regular Spinal Check-Ups:** It's much easier to prevent a problem than to correct one. See your chiropractor regularly.