

Maintaining a Healthy Back

If you have lower back pain, you are not alone. Nearly everyone at some point has back pain that interferes with work, routine daily activities or recreation. Americans spend at least \$50 billion each year on their low back pain, the most common cause of job-related disability and a leading contributor to missed work.

Back pain may be the result of poor ergonomics & posture. Symptoms include:

- Back pain that is worse at certain times of day or week, such as after a long day of sitting at the computer
- Pain that starts in the neck and moves downwards into the upper back, lower back and extremities;
- Pain that goes away after switching positions while sitting or standing
- Sudden back pain that is experienced with a new job, a new workstation or new office chair
- Back pain that comes and goes for months.

One of the best things you can do to prevent back pain is to exercise regularly and keep your back muscles strong. Exercises that increase balance and strength can decrease your risk of falling

and injuring your back or breaking bones. Tai chi and yoga – or any weight-bearing exercise that challenges your balance – are good ones to try.

Below are more tips for maintaining a healthy back:

- Always stretch before exercise or other strenuous physical activity.
- Don't slouch when standing or sitting. When standing, keep your weight balanced on your feet. Your back supports weight most easily when curvature is reduced.
- At home or work, make sure your work surface is comfortable height for you.
- Sit in a chair with good lumbar support and proper position and height for the task. Keep your shoulders back. Switch sitting positions often and periodically walk around the office or gently stretch muscles to relieve tension. A pillow or rolled-up towel placed behind the small of your back can provide some lumbar support. If you must sit for a long period of time, rest your feet on a low stool or a stack of books.
- Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.
- Sleep on your side to reduce any curve in your spine. Always sleep on a firm surface.

- Ask for help when transferring an ill or injured family member from a reclining to a sitting position or when moving the patient from a chair to a bed.
- Don't try to lift objects too heavy for you. Lift with your knees, pull in your stomach muscles, and keep your head down and in line with your straight back. Keep the object close to your body. Do not twist when lifting.
- Maintain proper nutrition and diet to reduce and prevent excessive weight, especially weight around the waistline that taxes lower back muscles. A diet with sufficient daily intake of calcium, phosphorus and vitamin D helps to promote new bone growth.
- If you smoke, quit. Smoking reduces blood flow to the lower spine and causes the spinal discs to degenerate.

QuickTakes

Bodies In Motion



Remember good posture and ergonomics, especially when you're in motion.

Walking, lifting heavy objects, holding a telephone, using tools or equipment and typing are all moving activities that require attention to posture and ergonomics. Back injuries are especially common while twisting and/or lifting and often occur because of awkward movement. Take some time to assess your physical environment and workspace and personalize the space to fit your body and your job. The time it takes to make adjustments is well worth the payoff.



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Stretching & Exercising At Work

During the course of the workday, it is often necessary to take short breaks and stretch. Stretching is beneficial because it promotes circulation and reduces muscle tension. Consider practicing the following exercises during your next break.

EYE MOVEMENT

- Close your eyes;
- Gently move eyes up to ceiling then slowly down to the floor;
- Repeat 3 times.
- Close your eyes again;
- Slowly and gently move eyes to the left, then slowly to the right;
- Repeat 3 times.

FOCUS CHANGE

- Hold one finger a few inches away from one eye;
- Focus on the finger;
- Slowly move the finger away;
- Focus far into the distance and then back to the finger;
- Slowly bring the finger back to within a few inches of the eye;
- Focus on something at least 8 ft away;
- Repeat with focus on the other eye.

HEALTHY BACK

- Lie on your back with both knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- With arms lying at your sides, tighten stomach muscles, squeeze buttocks, and slowly raise your hips into the air. Hold for 5 seconds and then slowly bring the buttocks back to the floor.
- Repeat 20 times.

HEALTHY BACK AND LEGS

- Stand with your back against a wall and your feet slightly apart.
- Slide into a half-sit. Hold this position as long as you can then slide back up.
- Repeat 5 times.

SIDE-BEND NECK STRETCH

- Tilt your head to one side with your ear toward your shoulder;
- Hold for 15 seconds;
- Relax.
- Repeat 3 times on each side.

SHOULDER SHRUG

- Slowly bring your shoulders up to your ears and hold for 3 seconds;

- Rotate shoulders back and down;
- Repeat 10 times.

FOOT ROTATION

- While sitting, slowly rotate each foot from the ankle;
- Rotate 3 times in one direction, then 3 times in the opposite direction;
- Then relax.
- Repeat 1 time.

WRIST STRETCH

- Hold arm straight out in front of you;
- Pull your hand backwards with the other hand, then pull downward;
- Hold for 20 seconds;
- Relax.
- Repeat 3 times each.

Aerobic exercise also stretches and strengthens the muscles that support your low back, which combined with healthy eating, can also help you maintain your ideal weight. If you're overweight, the extra pounds add to the strain on your low back.

Grilled Chicken Cuban Salad

Makes: 2 servings | 30 minutes

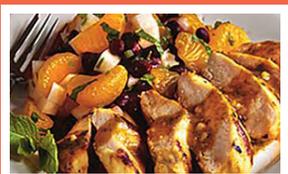
If you cannot find a ripe, fresh mango for this recipe, substitute 1 cup of frozen mango pieces.

Ingredients:

- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar mixed with 1 tablespoon pineapple or orange juice
- 1 teaspoons canola oil
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground red pepper
- 1 6-ounce (180-g) boneless, skinless chicken breast or turkey escalope, pounded to an even thickness
- 1 ripe mango
- 1/2 tablespoon honey mustard
- Non-stick cooking spray
- 4 cups (8 oz/240 g) mixed baby salad greens or torn romaine
- 1 small red bell pepper, seeded and sliced into thin strips

Nutritional Information (per serving):

190 Calories; 6g Fat; 2g Saturated fat; 20g Protein; 15g Carbohydrate; 4g Fiber; 410mg Sodium



Preparation:

1. Combine garlic, 1 tablespoon of the vinegar mixture, 1/2 teaspoon of the oil, the cumin, 1/8 teaspoon of the salt and the ground red pepper in a small bowl, mixing well. Place chicken or turkey on a plate; spread mixture evenly on both sides of the meat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 min.
2. Stand the mango on end and cut off flesh on either side of the flat pit. Peel the halves. Cut half into chunks. Cut the remaining half crosswise into thin slices and set aside until ready to serve. Combine the mango chunks, honey mustard, the remaining 1/8 teaspoon salt, the remaining 2 tablespoons vinegar mixture and remaining 1/2 teaspoon oil in a blender; process until smooth. Store in the refrigerator.
3. Light an outdoor grill or heat a stovetop grill pan over medium-high heat. Coat the grill rack with cooking spray. Grill the chicken or turkey for 3 to 4 minutes on each side or until firm and opaque. Transfer to a cutting board and let stand for 5 minutes. Cut the meat crosswise into thin slices.
4. Toss half of mango dressing with lettuces and bell pepper in a bowl. Mound the salad on 2 dinner plates. Arrange the chicken or turkey and mango slices on the salads. Spoon the remaining dressing evenly over salads.