



Wellness Tips To Better Your Life

In Flight

Wellness Weekly

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Healthy Weight & Nutritional Fitness | Physical Activity | Tobacco Free Living | Sleep Optimization

Your Back & Staying Fit

Understanding How Pain Affects Your Health & Fitness

“Age is nothing but a number,” so they say. And when your body is telling you that something is wrong, you definitely do not want to tell “it” to “take a number.” Your body knows when something is not right and will let you know to stop what is causing the problem in the most obvious way - through pain. We may not always listen to what our bodies are telling us, and we suffer from it. But that does not have to always be the case.

Pain is good and bad. It is our bodies way of signaling “Fight or Flight” and that something is wrong. The pain that our bodies experience is there to let us know that we need to change or stop the action that is causing the pain to occur in the first place.

In many cases, instead of stopping or decreasing the action causing the pain we pop NSAIDs, or Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs, like ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) or naproxen (Aleve) and hope the pain eventually goes away. This may work in the short run, but over time things will build up and you may pay dearly for it.

Physical Signs of Pain

We feel pain internally as well as externally. When a body part or joint is injured, inflammation at the site of injury may occur. Inflammation is the body’s immune response to a traumatic event and results in heat, swelling, a redness appearance, loss of function, and of course pain.¹

You could think of inflammation as the body’s response to protect against any further harm.² Any outside influencers such as walking, bending, lifting, pulling, or even touch can inflame and worsen the injury, or at least heighten the pain. Because inflammation causes the location of injury to become very hypersensitive, the pain is felt way before the tissue of the affected area is actually stressed and a response is warranted. These “danger” messages that travel up the spinal cord to the brain is the body’s way to prepare and react to protect the affected area.

Identifying Back Pain

One of the most common body areas that is affected day to day in most occupations is the lower back. It is estimated that 80 percent of working adults will suffer from low back pain, but only 20 to 30 percent will actually seek treatment with the most common forms of low back pain being acute and sciatica.³ These two forms of back pain are the most common and are sometimes referred to as “Mechanical Pain,” or back pain and is caused by placing abnormal stress or strain on the muscles and vertebral column.⁴ This is usually a result of bad habits, poor posture, poor seating, incorrect bending and lifting motions, and repetitive trauma or excessive weight bearing such as carrying heavy back packs or body armor.

Acute and Sciatica

Acute low back pain is characterized as pain that occurs posteriorly in the region between the lower rib margin and the proximal thighs and occurs over a period of less than six months. Sciatica pain is pain that radiates down to the legs and is felt behind the knees. Although both forms are not the only forms of back pain, studies have shown that between 30 and 60 percent of low back pain sufferers recover in one week with 60 to 90 percent recovering in six weeks. After 12 weeks of initial onset and treatment, 95 percent have shown to recover although recurrences are common.⁵

Tips to Prevent back Pain³

- Maintain a healthy diet and weight
- Remain active
- Avoid prolonged inactivity or bed rest.
- Warm up or stretch before exercising or physical activities, such as gardening
- Maintain proper posture
- Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes
- Sleep on a mattress of medium firmness to minimize any curve in your spine
- Lift with your knees, keep the object close to your body, and do not twist when lifting
- Quit smoking. Smoking impairs blood flow, resulting in oxygen and nutrient deprivation to spinal tissues
- Ensure that your computer work-station is ergonomically correct and you are using ergonomically correct seating

Additional References & Resources:

1. Chronic Pain-NIH; <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/pain/chronic.htm>
2. What is Inflammation-NIH Pubmed;<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/health/PMH0072482/>
3. Back Pain Facts and Statistics-American Chiropractic Association; <https://www.acatoday.org/Patients/Health-Wellness-Information/Back-Pain-Facts-and-Statistics>
4. What is Mechanical Back Pain and How Best to Treat It-NIH, Pubmed; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18973732>
5. Evaluation & Treatment of Acute Low Back Pain-AAFP; <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2007/0415/p1181.html>



See calendar on other side to see what's going on this week

A Personal Message From Your Health Promotion Health Myth Busting Team



Dear Health Myth Busters,

I'm a young man, 23 years old, and relatively new to the AF, and spent most of my formative years playing video games, sitting in front of a television. My mind is now mission focused, and I need to be ready to deploy 24/7, so I know the importance of being physically active. Recently, I've decided to increase my activity level but have noticed that my back is flaring up and causing some minor low back pain. A fellow airman and friend of mine recommended I stop exercising all together to alleviate my back pain, but I really dislike the idea of giving up the forward progress I've made. When it comes to low back pain, is it recommended to stop exercising completely?

Sincerely,
Low Back Pain

Dear Back Pain,

I'm glad you reached out with this question, it is a very common question, especially in cases like yours as a new beginner exerciser. It's also interesting to note that low back pain is one of the top 5 diagnosis in medical treatment facilities for men. The back pain you're describing is considered acute, which is pain lasting less than 3 months. If your pain begins to come and go, it would be considered recurrent back pain, and chronic is defined as lasting longer than 3 months.

Most people who have an episode of acute pain will have at least 1 recurrence. But not all low back pain is the same, so your treatment should be tailored for your specific symptoms and condition. A few of my recommendations include staying active and do as much of your normal routine as possible, without pain. If you need to decrease the intensity, or frequency start there and see if your pain begins to subside. I do not recommend stopping all activity completely, as this could actually slow down your recovery. It is also important to apply ice 2-3 times per day, and if possible alternate with moist heat using 5-10 min intervals, still applying 2-3 times per day.

If your pain gets worse, schedule an appointment to be seen by your Provider. Your Dr. can provide education on how to take better care of your back, and if needed you can obtain a referral to an exercise specialist to help with strengthening and flexibility routines. The specialist can also provide training for proper lifting, bending, sitting, doing chores and proper sleep hygiene. You may just need assistance in creating a safe and effective physical activity program to improve your overall health.

Sincerely,
Health Myth Busters

Got questions on other health issues related to sleep health, physical activity, tobacco, or nutrition? Share them with us and we will help you "Bust The Myths!" Send your questions to usaf.jbsa.afmoa.mbx.hpo@mail.mil. Make sure to include in the subject line "Health Myth Buster." For more online health tips visit the Air Force Healthy Living webpage <http://www.airforcemedicine.af.mil/HealthyLiving/>



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