

Protecting your back



Do you think that lifting something heavy is the most likely way to injure your back? You aren't alone. However, it may surprise you to know that just being sedentary can also harm your back, as can poor posture, wearing the wrong shoes or even carrying a heavy bag over one shoulder.¹ Fortunately, there are some simple but effective steps you can take which may help protect your back from strain and injuries related to everyday habits and activities.

The United States National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke recommends doing the following:¹

Protect your back when sitting

- Keep your stomach muscles tight (pulled in) and maintain the proper curve in your lower back (tighten your stomach and buttocks muscles, but don't hold your breath)
- Place a small cushion behind your lower back to help maintain the natural curve of your back
- Keep your knees slightly higher than your hips (try placing a footstool or book under your feet)
- Stand up and move around periodically to stretch tight muscles and give them a chance to relax

Protect your back when standing

- Stand with your weight equally distributed on both of your feet
- Carefully place one foot on a footstool to ease tension in your back
- Wear flat or low-heeled shoes if you stand for long periods of time
- As you do when sitting, keep your stomach muscles pulled in

Protect your back when sleeping

- Place a pillow between your knees while sleeping on your side
- Avoid sleeping on your stomach

- If you do not have knee problems, try placing a pillow under your knees when lying on your back to help take the pressure off your back muscles

Protect your back when lifting heavy objects

- Squat down to lift with your legs, instead of your back; your legs are much, much stronger than your back.
- Move the object close to you when picking it up; continue to hold it close to you as you move it
- Be sensible: get help to lift objects that are too heavy to lift on your own

You have more good information available to you through our *Beating Back Pain* campaign. Every move you make (lifting, sitting, standing, and sleeping) can be made with back safety in mind.

¹ National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, "Low Back Pain Fact Sheet," April 2020

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