

Back To Basics: Back Care



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"Back injury is the most common and most expensive muscle or bone problem in the U.S." reports *Business Week*. Back

pain sufferers range in age from children to the elderly. This two-part series will help identify some common causes of back pain and how to avoid injury. Also discussed will be how to treat an injured back before getting in to a professional.

To avoid and treat back pain, it's important to understand some basic anatomy. Your spine consists of seven vertebrae (bones) in your neck (cervical), 12 in your mid back (thoracic), five in your low back (lumbar), five fused bones in the base of your spine (sacrum) and two fused bones in your tailbone (coccyx). Your spine also has three main curves, if you look at your spine from the side. These curves give your spine flexibility against gravity to protect the discs (shock absorbers) of the spine. A loss of the curve in any part of your spine can lead to injury and degeneration. These curves are held in position by your ligaments and muscles. The muscles act as levers for the spine and the ligaments act as a glue to hold the bones of the spine together.

Things we do on a daily basis can affect the curves in the spine. Because of our daily activities, we need to

give our spine a fighting chance by taking care of ourselves through strengthening, nutrition, postural correction and chiropractic care. The most common injuries to our backs include muscle strains, ligament sprains and spinal disc injury.

Strain Versus Sprain

These two words are often used interchangeably, but incorrectly. They have very distinct meanings and relate to different structures.

A strain occurs to an overstretched **muscle**. There are three grades of a **strain**:

- **GRADE I:** Healing occurs within two to three weeks.
- **GRADE II:** Healing occurs within three to six weeks.
- **GRADE III:** This is a severe injury with a complete rupture of a muscle. This typically requires a surgical repair of the muscle; the healing period can be up to three months.

A sprain occurs to an overstretched **ligament**. Likewise, there are three grades of a **sprain**:

- **GRADE I:** (mild) causes overstretching or slight tearing of the ligaments with no joint instability. No functional loss.
- **GRADE II:** (moderate) causes partial tearing of the ligament and is characterized by bruising, moderate pain and swelling. May have some loss of function.

- **GRADE III:** (severe) complete tear or rupture a ligament. Pain, swelling and bruising are usually severe. This type of a muscle sprain often requires immobilization and possibly surgery.

The grade of a sprain or strain can be determined by your healthcare provider. A strain or sprain to a muscle or ligament can inflict further injury to your spine by causing instability and misalignment. Misalignments that are not corrected can cause degeneration of the spine over time. Degeneration of the spine can lead to such conditions as arthritis, disc herniations, scoliosis and nerve root impingements.

All injuries should be evaluated by a professional and any recommendations should be followed to prevent further injury. When found early, a misalignment can be corrected and scar tissue can be addressed, decreasing the further likelihood of injury. If you have misalignments or degenerative conditions of your spine, you should see your doctor right away.

In the next issue we will discuss spinal disc injuries and how to prevent injury to your muscles, ligaments and discs. ♦

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