

# Save Your Back During The Hectic Holiday Season



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Cold weather.  
Holiday meals.  
Shopping.  
Decorating.  
Gift wrapping.  
Entertaining.  
Family gatherings.  
Holiday Parties.

The holiday season is upon us. As we prepare for the holiday season it is important to take precautions and be prepared to handle extra stress. According to the American Chiropractic Association, the holiday season is the prime time for Americans to suffer from back pain.

The extra stress of the holidays often causes undue stress and aggravation to our bodies. This stress can exacerbate pre-existing conditions as well as cause new conditions. The following tips will help you identify and prevent injuries to your back this holiday season.

## It's Cold Outside!

Cold temperatures can cause muscles surrounding our spines to stiffen as a protective mechanism. Muscles stiffen as a result of reduced blood flow to them. Blood is shunted away from muscles to maintain vital organ functions when the muscles are at rest.

Dress in layers to prevent stiffening of your muscles. Most aches and pains follow a quick run to the mailbox or standing outside saying goodbye to loved ones after a holiday gathering. It doesn't take long for muscles to stiffen, and once they tighten you are more prone to injury.

## The Pitfalls Of Shopping

Long lines, heavy shopping bags and fatigue are all common culprits when it comes to back pain. Make sure you're comfortable, with supportive shoes, comfortable clothing and posture-friendly shopping bags. If you have a lot of shopping to do, make frequent trips to your car to avoid carrying heavy loads from store to store. When standing in long lines, shift your weight back and forth over both legs, and keep your knees slightly bent. Take breaks. Make it a rule to stop every half-hour and take a five-minute break. During these five minutes, stretch. Stretch your neck, arms, back and legs.

## Wrap It Up

Wrap presents on a table. Sitting on the floor can lead to poor posture and back pain. You'll find you're more productive at a table.

## Deck The Halls

One of the most common injuries during the holiday season is low back strain due to overreaching, falling off ladders or lifting incorrectly. Overreaching commonly occurs when getting decorations out of the attic, leaning off the side of a ladder when hanging Christmas lights, or reaching over the branches of the Christmas tree to hang ornaments. If you are lifting boxes or heavy objects (including your grandkids), be sure to protect your back by using your legs to lift instead of your back.



## Treating An Injury

The most common injuries to our backs include muscle strains, ligament sprains and spinal disc injury. The severity of the injury can be determined by your health care provider. With a strain or a sprain, it is important to ice the area right away. As much as heat may feel good during the first 24-48 hours after an injury, it is imperative to use ice. Ice treats and prevents inflammation and prevents scar tissue buildup. Ice should be wrapped in a damp hand towel and used 20 minutes on, and an hour off, throughout the first 24-48 hours.

Sticking to a routine of physical activity, getting adequate rest and eating well will also help relieve stress and tension during the holidays. Above all, relax! It's one of the best things you can do for yourself, your family and your back. ♦

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