

Watch your back!

Anthony J. Sacco, Sr. © Copyright May 2006
Reprinted from the Wyoming Rural News (WREN) Magazine, May 2006 issue

PINE BLUFFS — Here's the thing about people and back pain. Most of us are smart enough not to try lifting really heavy stuff like manhole covers or that old pick-up truck out back, but we tend to be careless about the little things that can bring on excruciating pain.

You stoop over to pick up the morning paper, twist around to grab your seatbelt, reach up to the top shelf for that can of paint. Suddenly, your back lets you know it's there — painfully pointing out that you've ignored or abused it once too often.

THREE VARIETIES

Experts divide back pain into three categories; mild — your basic aches and stiffness; moderate — difficulty standing straight, pain with movement, ability to walk but with discomfort; severe — unable to stand due to pain, severe leg pain with or without back pain, or being in such a state that coughing and sneezing hurt the back and legs.¹

In the past, doctors prescribed muscle relaxants, painkillers, sleeping pills, bed rest and even long periods of traction for acute back pain. These "solutions" often aggravated things. "Treatments very much contributed to the problem," Mark Brown, M.D., chairman of the Orthopedics and Rehabilitation Department at Miami University's

¹ First Aid for a Bad Back; Leon Root, M.D. Men's Health, February 1991.

Medical School said. "All that lying in bed actually increased the pain. And, we know that you shouldn't take painkillers for long periods. Eventually, physician and patient would get so frustrated by lack of progress that exploratory surgery would be recommended."²

Fortunately, doctors have changed the way they treat lower-back pain. Today's enlightened practitioners understand that the key to bouncing back from a bad back is preventive maintenance.

Many things can be done to keep your spine — bones, discs, muscles, ligaments, and other soft tissues — healthy and strong while reducing the risk of injury. "In fact," Dr. Brown says, "numerous potential back sufferers could probably sidestep the doctor's office altogether if they'd do just one — exercise."³

About this, all the experts agree. Even the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons offers videotape programs which include exercises designed to prevent pain, strengthen your back and increase flexibility.⁴ So some spine tuning is in order.

SPINE TUNING

Exercise will keep discs, muscles, ligaments and joints in the spine healthy and allows diffusion of nutrients into the disc space and soft tissues. A program of regular aerobics, such as running, jogging, biking or swimming, will strengthen muscles in the back and abdomen. Walking, biking, swimming and mat routines with a class or exercise videotape are effective forms of low impact exercise.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

² Holding Back Pain; Mike McGrath, Men's Health, Winter 1989.

Other preventive steps can be taken. Use the correct lifting and moving techniques. Don't slouch; poor posture puts a strain on your lower back. Maintain your proper body weight to avoid straining your back muscles. Perhaps equally important, keep a positive attitude about your job and home life. Studies show persons who are unhappy at work or home tend to have more back problems and take longer to recover than persons with positive attitudes.⁵

³ Ibid.

⁴ To order call the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, 1-800-824-BONES.

⁵ How to Prevent Back Pain; American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, April 2005. <http://orthoinfo.aaos.org>