



Moore Health Physiotherapy Low Back Pain

Almost everyone will experience some degree of low back pain sometime in their life. It can affect our everyday routines, our work and our social life. Without appropriate treatment low back pain has been found to reoccur in approximately 90% of sufferers and, at its most extreme, low back pain can become disabling. Whilst most occurrences of low back pain are not debilitating, even minor low back pain can cause us to restrict many of our everyday activities, such as carrying groceries, playing sport and reaching for overhead items. As with any musculoskeletal condition, early treatment is the key to a speedy recovery for anyone suffering low back pain.

Low Back Pain and Referred Pain:

Pain that is originating from the lower back can often be felt in adjacent areas of the body. This 'radiating' effect may result in pain being felt further up the back, in the legs, and even right down to the feet!

Who is affected?

Men and women are equally affected by low back pain. Whilst low back pain is experienced by all age groups, from children through to the elderly, it occurs most often between ages 30 and 50. This is due in part to the aging process, but is also a result of sedentary life styles with too little (or too much) exercise (National Institute of Neurological Disorders & Strokes—USA).

Common causes of Low Back Pain:

As people age, their bone strength, muscle elasticity and muscle tone tends to decrease. Adults with back pain can have restricted movement in one or more directions and often experience some muscle weakness. Whilst there are many factors/conditions that may contribute to low back pain, some of the most common include:

1. A sedentary occupation involving prolonged sitting (e.g. computer work or driving)
2. Poor abdominal muscle strength
3. Being inherently inflexible or hyper flexible
4. Injury or trauma to the back, or the build up of scar tissue from an old injury
5. Degenerative diseases such as arthritis and osteoporosis
6. Poor sleeping position, obesity, smoking, weight gain during pregnancy, stress, poor physical condition, and inappropriate posture for the activity being performed.

Tips for Preventing Low Back Pain:

For the overwhelming majority of people, low back pain will be caused by muscle weakness in the back, abdomen, or both. Here are some of the top tips for taking care of your back and preventing low back pain:

- 1) **Stay as active** as possible and maintain a good level of fitness and flexibility.
- 2) **Maintain good posture.** It is important to train yourself to recognise when you are slouching or sitting too stiffly and causing tension in your muscles. (Refer to the Fact Sheet on **Posture** for more information about maintaining good posture).
- 3) **Avoid sitting for periods longer than 20–30 minutes.** Remember to regularly stand up and move around. Whilst standing, arch your spine slowly backwards; we don't normally move our backs in that direction and as a result the ligaments involved can shorten.
- 4) **Watch what you sit on!** For example, men should avoid sitting on a flat wallet in their back pocket; this can put pressure on the sciatic nerve.
- 5) **Maintain good abdominal strength.** This does not mean that you need to do hundreds of sit-ups! Many of your stomach muscles start in the back, so stomach muscles are a key factor in maintaining the strength and stability of your back. A qualified physiotherapist will be able to advise you on exercises specifically for the situation.
- 6) **Consider your bag.** For both children and adults the use of a backpack rather than a shoulder bag will help distribute weight more evenly.
- 7) **Learn preventative measures** such as learning correct ways of bending and lifting, ensuring that your work bench is at the correct height or using chairs with good support.
- 8) **Try and relax.** Your muscles get tight and sore when you are stressed. Learn some simple relaxation exercises (like abdominal breathing) and incorporate them into your everyday routine.
- 9) **Maintain a healthy weight.** Just carrying around a little extra weight can throw extra pressure onto your spine!
- 10) **Prevention is always better than a cure!** A qualified health professional, such as a musculoskeletal physiotherapist can tailor a back exercise program specifically to your needs. Doing these exercises regularly will help with strength, flexibility, and range of motion... all the things you need in order to avoid low back pain!