

The Spine Column

THE MVP NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS WITH LOW BACK PAIN

ISSUE 1 | 2012



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The Spine Column Newsletter is going green!

MVP is now offering the option to receive *The Spine Column* by email. Email communications allow for easier “save and share” benefits to newsletter subscribers, in addition to the environmental advantages. You also can keep issues with particularly relevant health care topics or news, and effortlessly share this information with your family or caregiver. If you would like to opt in to receive this newsletter electronically, simply email ecomunications@mvphealthcare.com with the words *Subscribe-The Spine Column* in the subject line.



Back Pain and Obesity

According to the American Obesity Association (AOA) about 127 million adult Americans are categorized as being overweight or obese. The unfortunate truth is that obesity is becoming a global epidemic, affecting both adults and children.

Most people know that obesity leads to the development of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and colon cancer. Did you know that obesity also is a contributing factor to back pain? Being overweight or obese can lead to symptoms associated with a variety of lower back conditions.

The part of the spine that is most vulnerable to the effects of obesity is the low back. Lack of exercise can lead to poor flexibility and weak muscles in the back, pelvis and thighs. This increases the curve of the lower back, causing the pelvis to tilt too far forward. This is also bad for posture—and as posture weakens, other regions of the spine (neck) may become painful.

If you are overweight or obese, you may be at risk for developing one of these conditions.

- **Osteoporosis:** An inactive lifestyle coupled with an unbalanced diet can affect the density (strength) of the bones and increase the risk of bone fractures, which can be painful and disabling.
- **Low Back Pain:** Obesity may make an existing low back problem worse and contribute to recurrence of the condition.
- **General:** Unhealthy posture causes neck and back pain. A certain level of physical fitness is necessary to properly support the spine.

To lower the harmful effects that obesity has on back health, it is important to eat right and exercise. Ask your doctor for help with a diet and exercise plan that is right for you!

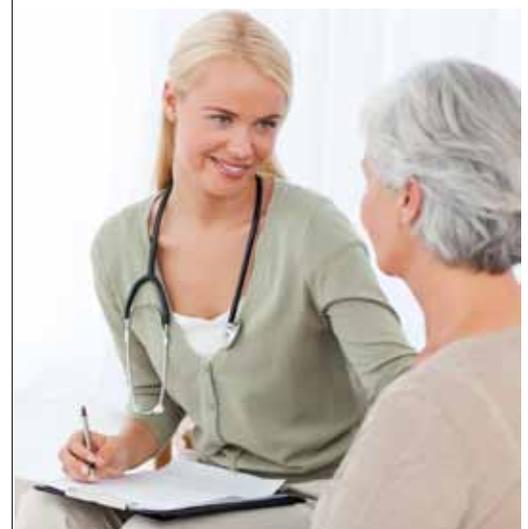
Source: www.spineuniverse.com

Quick Tips for Being Prepared to Talk with Your Doctor

Patients who have good relationships with their doctors are more satisfied with their care and have better results. Here are some tips to help you and your doctor become better partners in improving your health care.

- Write down your questions before your visit. List the most important ones first to make sure they get asked and answered.
- Bring a “health history” list with you, and keep it up to date.
- Always bring any medications you are taking, including over-the-counter, or a list of those medications (include when and how often you take them) and what strength.
- You might want to bring someone along to help you ask questions and remember the answers.
- Find more information and printable forms at www.mvphealthcare.com.

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) at www.ahrq.gov/consumer/quicktips/doctalk.htm





Nonsurgical Treatments for Back Pain

Treatment for back pain generally depends on what kind of pain you experience: acute or chronic.

Acute back pain often gets better on its own, although you may want to try acetaminophen, aspirin or ibuprofen to help ease the pain. Try to go about your usual activities as much as you can. Getting up and moving around can help ease stiffness and relieve pain.

Treatment for **chronic back pain** falls into two basic categories: the kind that requires an operation and the kind that does not. Most often, back pain does not require surgery. Doctors will nearly always try nonsurgical treatments first. In a very small percentage of cases, surgery is necessary to ease the pain and prevent further problems.

Following are some of the more commonly used nonsurgical treatments for chronic back pain.

Hot or cold: Hot or cold packs—or sometimes a combination of the two—can be soothing to sore, stiff backs. Heat dilates (widens) the blood vessels,

improving the flow of oxygen and reducing muscle spasms. Heat also lessens the sensation of pain. Cold may reduce inflammation by reducing the size of blood vessels and the flow of blood to the area.

Exercise: While exercise is usually not advisable for acute back pain, proper exercise can help ease chronic pain and perhaps reduce the risk of it returning. The following four types of exercise are important to general physical fitness and may be helpful for certain causes of back pain.

IMPORTANT: Check with your doctor before performing any of these exercises

Flexion: Flexion exercises, which are exercises in which you bend forward, serve to widen the spaces between the bones of the spine, reducing pressure on the nerves. They also stretch muscles of the back and hips and strengthen abdominal muscles.

Extension: With extension exercises, you bend backward. They may help reduce radiating pain, which is pain you can feel in other parts of the body besides where it starts. The theory behind these exercises is that they open up the spinal canal and develop muscles that support the spine.

Stretching: The goal of stretching exercises is to improve the extension of muscles and other soft tissues of the back. This can reduce back stiffness and improve range of motion.

Aerobic: Aerobic exercise is the type that gets your heart pumping faster and keeps your heart rate elevated for a while, such as brisk walking, jogging or swimming. For fitness, it is important to get at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three times a week. For back problems, you should avoid high-intensity exercise or activity that calls for twisting, such as aerobic dancing and rowing, because these actions may increase pressure on your spine and do more harm than good.

Source: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

Health Clicks

Take advantage of MVP Health Care's online resources to help you take charge of your health, available 24 hours a day at www.mvphealthcare.com!



Make informed decisions about your health by using the Healthwise® Knowledgebase — our online Health Encyclopedia

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If you think you are ready to make a change in your health habits, or are looking for resources to explore healthy ideas that may be right for you, click on any of our interactive *Health Tools and Calculators* for quick, personalized results. Are you ready to quit smoking? Want to learn tips for managing stress? How many calories do you burn during your workout? For answers to these questions and more, visit www.mvphealthcare.com, click on *Live Healthy* and then *Health Tools and Calculators*.



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- The ChooseHealthy discount network also includes 15,000 fitness clubs and exercise centers at which you can get "best pricing" and a free trial offer.
- You also can receive up to 40 percent off suggested retail pricing on dietary supplements and fitness products through the ChooseHealthy online store, plus free shipping on most items.



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MVP Health Care offers a condition health management program for members living with chronic back pain. For more information or to see if you qualify, call 1-866-942-7966. MVP's program is based on the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement's (ICSI) health care guideline for the treatment of adult low back pain.

"MVP Health Care" is the parent company of MVP Health Insurance Company; MVP Health Plan, Inc.; MVP Health Insurance Company of New Hampshire, Inc.; MVP Health Plan of New Hampshire, Inc.; and MVP Select Care, Inc., which issue or administer health benefit plans. Not all plans available in all states.

