

# PHYSIOTHERAPY

IF YOUR BACK HURTS, DON'T IGNORE THE PAIN. PHYSIOTHERAPISTS HAVE THE TRAINING TO CORRECTLY ASSESS THE PROBLEM AND PROVIDE SAFE, EFFECTIVE TREATMENT. FOR RAPID RECOVERY, SEE YOUR PHYSIOTHERAPIST EARLY.



## WHAT CAUSES BACK PAIN?

### POSTURAL STRESS

Poor posture stresses your spine. Ligaments are over-stretched, muscles tire and joints and nerves are put under pressure.

### MUSCLE STRAINS

Minor back muscle strains quickly improve on their own, but more severe strains will need physiotherapy treatment to relieve pain and promote healing.

### LIGAMENT SPRAINS

Stretching ligaments too far or too quickly makes them tear and bleed into surrounding tissues, causing swelling and pain. Motor vehicle and sporting accidents are common causes.

### DISC PROBLEMS

Discs are anchored to the vertebrae, above and below, so they cannot 'slip' out of place. They can wear down with age, but most disc problems arise from injury. Discs can bulge (prolapse), herniate or even rupture.

### SCIATICA

The sciatic nerves run from the lower back, through the buttocks and down the back of your legs. Irritation anywhere along this pathway will cause pain in the back and legs.

### ARTHRITIS

Vertebral and facet joints can be affected by arthritis, causing degeneration and inflammation within the joint and the growth of bony spurs on the edges of the vertebrae.

### MUSCLE WEAKNESS

Recent research has shown that weakness of the deep abdominal muscles can contribute to increased strain on the lower back.

## HOW YOUR BACK WORKS

Your back is a complex system of interlocking components:

- Vertebrae are the bones that make up the spinal column.
- Discs separate the vertebrae and act as shock absorbers.
- Facet joints between the vertebrae guide spinal movement.
- Ligaments hold the vertebrae together.
- Muscles are attached to the bones. They control and produce movement.



## TIPS TO HELP YOU MOVE WELL AND STAY WELL

Here is some useful advice to help you prevent back pain:

### LIFTING

With your feet shoulder-width apart, bend at the hips and knees. Grip the load firmly and hold it close to your body, tighten your stomach muscles and use the strong muscles of your legs to lift. Keep your back as straight as possible, and gently breathe out. Avoid twisting – turn by using your feet, not your back.

### STANDING POSTURE

Think tall: chest lifted, shoulders relaxed, chin tucked in and head level. Posture should be stable, balanced and relaxed. when sitting, walking or standing.

### SITTING

Don't stay seated for too long, ideally no more than 20 minutes. Stand up, stretch and walk around. The right back support will also help. Also ensure that your workstation and computer are correctly positioned.

### EXERCISE

Stay in shape – healthy body-weight is less strain on your back. Your physiotherapist can show you how to keep your back flexible and strong with correct back and abdominal exercises.

### DRIVING

Good support from your car seat will prevent back pain. If you need more lower back support, use a lumbar roll or a rolled-up towel.

## SLEEPING

Your mattress should be firm enough to support your natural shape.

## HOW PHYSIOTHERAPY CAN HELP

Almost all Australian doctors refer patients with back pain to physiotherapists in preference to other health practitioners. Depending upon the cause and type of pain, physiotherapists treat back pain in a variety of ways:

- Advice and early activity (recent research indicates that one of the most important treatments for low back pain is movement).
- Mobilisation/manipulative physiotherapy.
- McKenzie therapy.
- Specific stabilisation exercises.
- General exercises and stretches.
- Ergonomic advice.
- Postural advice.

APA Musculoskeletal physiotherapists have postgraduate training in the management of musculoskeletal disorders and have more ways to help your back move well and stay well. Research has proven that specific stabilisation exercises are an effective treatment for low back pain. Physiotherapists are the only group of professionals appropriately qualified and educated to instruct in these exercises.

Ongoing 'maintenance treatments' should not be required once your back has been successfully treated by a physiotherapist. Your physiotherapist will encourage self-management through specific exercise prescription. If severe pain persists, other causes will need to be investigated. Your physiotherapist can order X-rays or recommend that you see a doctor.

## GENERAL

Many Physiotherapists in private practice are listed in the Yellow Pages. Physiotherapists also work in public hospitals and community health centres. Check to see if a physiotherapist is a member of the APA. Members of the APA are bound by a professional Code of Ethics and have access to extensive and continuing postgraduate education programmes.

## HEALTH REBATES

You may consult a physiotherapist either directly or by referral from your medical practitioner. Most private health insurance funds offer rebates for physiotherapy treatment.

## YOUR COMPLIMENTARY COPY SUPPLIED BY:



**AUSTRALIAN PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION**

*Move well. Stay well.*

© 2003 Australian Physiotherapy Association. ABN 89 004 265 150