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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Being Overweight Not Good For Your Back

It is common knowledge that being overweight is not good for your health. However, even with that in mind, over forty percent of the general population is overweight enough to be considered clinically obese. As with any Chiropractor's office, I have patients who enter my office repetitively over the years for acute low back pain.

The specific incidents or accidents that may have caused the low back pain are usually very different for each patient. Unfortunately, there is often a common characteristic among a few of them. I am referring to primarily the men who are in the clinically obese category and have a large percentage of their body fat stored in their abdominal region. I have heard my male patients jokingly refer to it as their "Molson muscle", spare tire, their "ab" muscle (note that it is singular, not plural), and even their boiler. I appreciate and encourage the fact that my patients are comfortable enough in my office to be able to joke about themselves. However, this is a serious problem and I always encourage them to address it. When an obese male, or even a pregnant female, is carrying a lot of extra weight at their abdominal region, the low back is put under much greater stress than normal. The pressure on the joints, muscles, disks, and ligaments is dramatically increased. Also, when a person is overweight, their level of activity is generally lower than if they were not overweight. If there is a lack of exercise in a person's lifestyle, the low back problems will be amplified even further.

When sitting or standing, the gravitational forces on a large abdomen will pull it in a forward and downward direction. This is just simply gravity not working in our favor. To compensate for this, we have to lean backward with our lower and upper back. The force of us leaning backwards counteracts the force of the abdomen pulling forward. Unfortunately, when we lean backwards, the concave curve in the low back is increased dramatically. This compresses the joints in the lower back, which reduces how much the individual joints are able to move. The more compressed the joints are, the more likely they are to become stiff or even injured during what should normally be an easy task. If this is combined with a lack of exercise, the muscles are generally deconditioned and are not able to assist in supporting the back.

The "disks" are located between each of the vertebrae of the spine. They are made up of a ligament material and have a center of "jelly-like fluid". After long periods of increased compression force from bearing the extra abdominal weight, the disks begin to wear out. At first, they acquire little tears in the ligament material. Then they begin to lose their thickness and their ability to act as shock absorbers. This can be viewed on a x-ray as the space between the vertebrae being decreased. When enough little tears in the disk have occurred, the jelly-like material begins to push outwards from the center and form a bulge in the disk. This is called a "herniated" disc. If unlucky enough, the nerves exiting from the spinal cord will become pinched. This will eventually lead to an array of symptoms, all of which usually include lots of pain.

To prevent this from happening in your back. There are two things you must first address. Firstly, you have to lose the extra weight you are carrying in your abdominal region. This will take the pressure off your back and decrease the excess curvature in your spine. The second thing you must do is exercise regularly so that the number of calories you burn in a day is more than number of calories you consume. Also, when you exercise, the muscles in your abdominal lower back region will become stronger and support the ligaments and joints in the lower back even that much more.

If you do have a large abdominal region and your low back is sore, many different to health care practitioners (such as chiropractors, physiotherapists, and massage therapists) that can help you. However, if you continue to not participate in regular exercise and not get the weight problem under control, the lower back pain will inevitably reoccur. I would also suggest that if you need to make changes in your diet, you pursue the services of the local dietitian, Lisa, at the hospital. She will be able to help you choose the foods that are lower in calories so that the total amount or number of calories you consume in a day will decrease. I would also recommend that you seek the services of Marcel Ouellet (378-3043), certified personal trainer and rehabilitation assistant. He can design an exercise program for you that meet your specific needs and has a large cardiovascular endurance component. Simply lifting weights will not allow you to burn calories and lose weight. You have to do exercise that increases your heart rate and maintains it there for longer periods of time. Once you have made the appropriate changes to your diet and have commenced your exercise program, your back may still require a little assistance. The Chiropractor is well trained to get those stiff and tight joints in your lower back moving smoothly and freely again. Also, it is a good idea that you let your medical doctor know that you are starting an exercise program and to see if he or she has any objections or concerns.

In closing, it is important that you know that the changes in your lifestyle that I am talking about are for the long-term and not for the short-term. If you are successful, not only will you experience less severe and less frequent back pain,

you'll also feel more healthy and able to accomplish more physical activities than you were able to before.

If you have any further questions regarding weight loss, an exercise program, or chiropractic care of low back pain, please don't hesitate to call my office.