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

Vertebrogenic Back Pain

As a chiropractor, most of the people that come to see me have some form of low back pain, upper back pain, neck pain, or headaches. The most common by far is low back pain. To most patients' surprise and delight, the low back pain is rarely due a "herniated" or "slipped" disk (this is when the round little cushion of ligament material between the vertebrae of the spine is seriously damaged). In fact, a more common source of low back pain originates from the joints, muscles, and nerves of the lumbar spine.

The simplest term to describe this type of low back pain is "vertebrogenic", which means the pain is "generated from the vertebrae" of the lumbar spine. This type of back pain most often affects those of you who have an occupation or perform an activity that requires long periods of sitting or standing. It is also likely that you do not participate in a regular exercise and stretching routine. Carrying extra body weight will further put you at risk. The chiropractic profession has made leaps and bounds in the area of research on this topic. It is something chiropractors are very familiar with and they are likely treating more patients with it than any other health care practitioner.

The low back portion of your spine is the most susceptible area for vertebrogenic back pain. It is called the "lumbar spine" and is normally a fairly flexible structure. It is made up of five vertebrae that have two small joints between each of them. These joints allow your low back to bend forwards and backwards, as well as a smaller amount of rotation. When the muscles of this region have good flexibility and the joints have a normal range of motion, the back will remain healthy and pain-free.

However, once the time commitments of family, work, and whatever else you are involved in begin, you have less time to be "active". Inevitably, you end up spending more time doing other activities that are not considered exercise. In a surprisingly short period of time, your back muscles can become a little tight and your joints do not have the full movement that they used to. At this point, you may wake up stiff in the morning and not even be able to sit or stand without getting a tight lower back. There may not be any real pain involved, but a problem has already started. The average age of these people is thirty to sixty years old. If left untreated and your lifestyle remains the same, more serious problems will eventually arise. Eventually, you will attempt to do some form of physical activity that requires more flexibility in the muscles and a greater range of motion in the joints than you can produce. For example, one day you reach down to put your sock on and suddenly you feel a sharp pain in the lower back. The joints in your lower back quickly become swollen and inflamed. The nerves that are exiting the spine between

the vertebrae become irritated. These nerves then function in a hyperactive state, causing painful muscle spasms in the low back.

When you see a chiropractor to correct your problem, the goal is to restore that lost muscle flexibility and joint mobility. Without doing this, the pain will last longer and even if it does eventually go away, you are just as prone for it to return. When your sore joints have their proper mobility restored, you are able to become more active. Once your back is able to move again, your body is able to remove the swelling and heal the joint naturally and faster. This is why the old theory of bed rest for back pain just doesn't work. It may even prolong the suffering.

To prevent your back from tightening in the first place, walk at brisk pace for at least twenty minutes per day and do some simple stretching exercises (free examples are given on my website at www.merrittchiro.com). For best results, combine this with seeing your chiropractor regularly so small problems can be identified and corrected before they become big ones.