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

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## The Cost of Back Pain

Almost two-thirds of Canadian adults suffered from back pain in the past year and a majority report their pain as moderate to severe. Those are the findings of a new national survey conducted by Environics Research Group for the Canadian Chiropractic Association. The impact of back pain on the daily lives of sufferers ranged from time off work and difficulty concentrating, to restricted family and physical activities, and depression.

These findings are a wake-up call, they show that back pain hits Canadians hard. Too often the physical and emotional cost of back pain isn't taken seriously and back pain is frequently dismissed as something that will eventually go away on its own. This study tells us that is not the case.

Thirty percent of those surveyed say their pain lasted a month or more including 16 percent who report back pain that is chronic and continuous. Those who report their back pain as severe are more likely to report that their pain never went away.

In addition to the human toll, back pain also hurts Canada's economy. Of those who were working at the time they experienced back pain, 15 percent report losing time off work ranging from a few days (18 percent) to a month or more (53 percent). Health Canada estimates that musculoskeletal disorders, including back pain, cost society a total of \$16.4 billion in direct (treatment and rehabilitation) costs and lost productivity.

Linda Eldrige of Chicago, a leader in the field of multidisciplinary systems for the care of patient groups, isn't at all surprised by the statistics. "Back pain", notes Eldrige, "among other musculoskeletal conditions is the leading cause of absenteeism and the second leading cause what employers call "presenteeism" meaning diminished productivity due to pain and the side effects of its medication while on the job. All told, these productivity/work loss costs can exceed the costs of providing medical care for those same back conditions by a factor of 1 or 2, depending on the type of industry.

Prevention and/or a more proactive/less expensive, but equally effective method of treatment for back pain clearly benefits everyone – financially and otherwise.”

Back pain also hits Canadian’s wallets. Consumers spent \$21.5 million on back pain products in Canada in 1999. The survey found that back pain sufferers turn to a range of different remedies in their search for relief. The most common treatment used to relieve back pain is over-the-counter medication (37 percent). More than a third of the back pain sufferers surveyed visited either a chiropractor, physiotherapist, massage therapist or family doctor. Fourteen percent of back pain sufferers did nothing to treat their pain, the most frequent reason being they “thought it would go away”.

This information points to the need for patients to become more proactive with their spinal health. A combination of regular chiropractic care, exercise, and a healthy diet is a good start. If you just ignore a back problem, it can become a long-term debilitating condition that could have a serious impact on your quality of life.