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

Your Mattress and Your Back Pain

Throughout the past seven years as a chiropractor in Merritt, I have had many people with low back pain ask me what is the best type of mattress for them to buy. They were searching for a clear answer because they believed that the mattress they were using at that time was responsible for the back pain they woke up with every morning. However, the answer I gave them was generally not what they expected.

Allow me to give you an example. Mr. Smith has been waking up with stiffness in his low back for the past few months. The severity of this low back stiffness varies from day to day but never quite goes away. He does not remember having a specific traumatic low back injury, but just that his back hurts after sleeping on that "damn mattress" of his.

Mr. Smith had come to see me in my office to have his back looked at and to see if I could recommend a good mattress for him to buy. I examined his back and found that numerous joints in his lower spine had very poor mobility and the muscles were in a state of chronic tension. It was also highly likely that he experienced ongoing bouts of inflammation in and around the stiff joints that irritated the nerves exiting between each of the vertebrae of the spine. This would cause more pain and muscle tension, which would even further limit the mobility of the joints in his spine.

For the following two reasons, it had become apparent to me that his problem was not the bed at all. First, his mattress was of good quality and only four or five years old. Therefore, it should not have been showing any signs of wear. Second, his early morning low back symptoms only started to show up three months ago and he had been in the same bed for over four years before this with no problems.

In fact, Mr. Smith's problem was just a chronic low back condition that was never addressed properly. His normally active lifestyle had become quite sedentary over the past four to six months due to extra responsibilities at work and at home. This lack of activity had allowed the joints in his low back to gradually become quite stiff and tight. This scenario of events eventually led to muscle tension and irritation of the nerves exiting his spine.

As with any joint in your body, it will feel and heal better whenever you use it. Therefore, whenever Mr. Smith stopped using or moving the joints in his low back, his joints became even stiffer. This, in turn, would lead to more muscle tension and irritation of the nerves exiting the spine. This scenario occurred every time he went to bed. His back was already not working normally during the day but by moving around at work he did not notice any significant symptoms. But, when he went to bed, his back stiffened and in the morning he was in pain. Then, when he got up and became mobile, the symptoms decreased again. He experienced this over and over again every day and soon began to blame his mattress.

I convinced Mr. Smith to keep his existing mattress for a little while longer and undergo a series of chiropractic treatments to address the low back condition. If he simply bought a new mattress without eliminating his back problem, he would continue to feel the same morning stiffness in his back. After a couple weeks of conservative chiropractic adjustments, the joints in his low back had their full mobility. The inflammation that was irritating his spinal nerves had disappeared and the muscle tension gradually subsided. Even with his same old “damn mattress”, he was then able to sleep longer, more comfortably, and without any morning stiffness.