

Dr. Colin Gage

Nicola Valley Chiropractic
2076A Granite Ave.
P.O. Box 909
Merritt, BC
V1K 1B8

Ph: (250) 378-5456
Fax: (250) 378-8259
Email: info@merrittchiro.com
Website: www.merrittchiro.com

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

Back Injuries at Work

Whether it's dull and annoying or screaming for attention, back pain can make it hard to concentrate on your job. Many occupations place significant demands on your back. Even routine office work can worsen back pain if you fall into risky habits, such as of poor posture. But, you can avoid back pain and injuries by paying attention to what causes them and focusing on prevention.

What causes back injuries?

Doctors and scientists aren't sure about all of the causes of back injury. In fact, most back problems are probably the result of a combination of factors. Some factors, such as weight gain, inactivity, and inflexibility, can be controlled by changing your lifestyle. Still other factors are work related, and you may or may not be able to modify these to prevent injury.

Four work-related factors are associated with increased risk of back injury:

- **Force.** Exerting too much force on your back may cause injury. If your job is physical in nature, you might face injury if you frequently lift or move heavy objects.
- **Repetition.** Repetition refers to the number of times you perform a certain movement. Overly repetitious tasks can lead to muscle fatigue or injury, particularly if they involve stretching to the end of your range of motion or awkward body positioning.
- **Posture.** Posture refers to your position when sitting, standing or performing a task. If, for instance, you spend most of your time in front of a computer, you may experience occasional aches and pains from sitting still for extended periods of time. On average, your body can tolerate being in one position for about 20 minutes before you feel the need to adjust.
- **Stress.** Pressures at work or at home not only ratchet up your stress level but can lead to muscle tension and tightness, which may in turn lead to back pain.

How to avoid injuries

Your best bet in preventing back injury is to be as fit as you can be and take steps to make your work and your working environment as safe as possible.

- **Be fit.** Even if you move around a lot on your job or your job requires physical exertion, you still need to exercise. Regular exercise is your best bet in maintaining a healthy back. First of all, you'll keep your weight in check, and carrying around a healthy weight for your body's

frame minimizes stress on your back. You can do specific strengthening and stretching exercises that target your back muscles. Regular exercise will also increase your long-term flexibility. Strong and flexible muscles will keep your back in tip-top shape.

- **Pay attention to posture.** Poor posture stresses your back. When you slouch or stand with a swayback, you exaggerate your back's natural curves. Such posture can lead to muscle fatigue and injury. In contrast, good posture relaxes your muscles and requires minimal effort to balance your body. If you stand for long periods, rest one foot on a stool or small box from time to time. While you stand, hold reading material at eye level. Don't bend forward to do deskwork or handwork. To promote comfort and good posture while sitting, choose a chair that supports your back. Adjust the chair so that your feet stay flat on the floor. If the chair doesn't support your lower back's curve, place a rolled towel or small pillow behind your lower back. Remove bulky objects, such as a wallet, from your back pockets when you sit because they disrupt balance in your lower back.
- **Lift properly.** There's a right way and a wrong way to lift and carry a load. Some key tips for lifting the right way include letting your legs do the work, keeping objects close to your body and recruiting help if a load is too heavy.
- **Adjust your workspace.** Look at the setup of your office or work area. Think about how you could modify repetitive job tasks to reduce physical demands. Remember that you're trying to decrease force and repetition and maintain healthy, safe postures. For instance, you might use lifting devices or adjustable equipment to help you heft loads. If you're on the phone most of the day, try a headset. Avoid cradling the phone between your shoulder and ear to free up your hands for yet another task. If you work at a computer, make sure that your monitor and chair are positioned properly.
- **Plan your moves.** Reorganize your work to eliminate high-risk, repetitive movements. Avoid unnecessary bending, twisting and reaching. Limit the time you spend carrying heavy briefcases, purses and bags. If you're carrying something heavy, know exactly where you intend to set it and whether that space is free from clutter.
- **Listen to your body.** If you must sit or stand for a prolonged period, change your position often. Take a 30-second timeout every 15 minutes or so to stretch, move or relax. Try standing up when you answer the phone, to stretch and change positions. If your back hurts, stop activities that aggravate it.
- **See your chiropractor.** By seeing your chiropractor, you will receive conservative treatment and professional advice. In addition, whether you already have back pain or you just want to prevent it, chiropractic care should be your first step in relieving your back pain and restoring your active lifestyle.
- **Work on coordination and balance.** Simple enough, walking regularly for exercise can help you maintain your coordination and balance. You can also perform balance exercises to keep you steady on your feet.
- **Reduce stress.** Being under stress causes you to tense your muscles, and this can make you more prone to injury. In addition, the more stress you feel, the lower your tolerance for pain. Try to minimize your sources of stress both on the job and at home. Develop coping mechanisms for times when you feel especially stressed. For instance, perform deep-breathing exercises, take a walk around the block or talk about your frustrations with a trusted friend.

