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

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## What to do When Back Pain Strikes

Back pain can strike almost anyone at any time. Therefore, I thought that this week's article should cover what you should do if you are unfortunate enough to experience an acute bout of back pain. Most of the recommendations given below apply to a new onset of acute back pain.

- When it comes to acute back pain, do not ignore the pain. It is the body's way of telling us that something is wrong. Stop doing whatever started the pain attack in the first place and ease yourself gently into a more comfortable position.
- If you are working or exercising hard in a warm environment when the pain hits, drink two large glasses of quality water. This can sometimes give relief within minutes if the muscle spasms are due to dehydration. The body needs a minimum of eight 8-ounce glasses of water daily to keep acidic wastes from building up in muscles and other tissues, which will lead to painful muscle spasms.
- If the pain is severe, try lying on your back, hands by your sides, with your knees up. This takes the pressure off your back.
- If the pain follows an injury or sudden movement, apply ice (a bag of frozen vegetables from the freezer works well) numerous times for twenty minutes at a time, with thirty minutes between applications, for the first forty-eight hours. During this initial 48 hours, it is important to see your chiropractor for further advice.
- When getting up from lying down, roll to your side, draw your knees up, push up to a sitting position using your arms, and stand by pushing up with hands on your legs.
- If it doesn't cause sharp pain, try doing some gentle stretches. Gentle stretches can actually help you heal more quickly, while inactivity will prolong your pain. Refer to the simple low back exercises available for free on my website ([www.merrittchiro.com](http://www.merrittchiro.com)).
- In general and soon after injuring your back, do not do any bending, twisting or lifting.
- In general and after an acute bout of back pain, keep your knees a little higher than your hips when sitting. At the same time, keep your feet flat on the floor.
- Move around even just a little. Do not sit or lie in the same position for long periods of time. Remaining completely sedentary when you have acute low back pain will only increase your pain and prolong the recovery.
- See your chiropractor right away. It is important to have a diagnosis made and appropriate treatment started as soon as possible.

There are also some things you can do to prevent acute back pain from occurring in the first place. I have listed some of them below.

- If you smoke, quit. Studies have shown that people who don't smoke are more likely to experience long-lasting relief from back pain, including less persistent problems overall than those who do smoke. Smoking also makes the disks in your back age faster and stiffen up, because it keeps oxygen and blood from getting to your back.
- Once the acute pain has subsided and your chiropractor determines that it is safe for you to do it, he or she can show you some simple abdominal strengthening exercises. This will help to prevent recurrences of the back pain.
- When carrying things on your shoulder, switch the weight to the other side from time to time. Carrying heavy shoulder bags may produce neck, back, and shoulder pain.
- Always push large objects; never pull them.
- If you are a nursing mother, put pillows behind your back for comfort and bring your baby to your breast rather than strain your back by bending over your infant. If you're nursing in a chair, make sure that it's a chair with good back support.
- Do not sleep on your stomach with your head raised on a pillow. Instead, rest your back by lying on your side with your legs bent, so that your knees are about an inch higher than your hips. Sleep on a medium firm mattress with your head supported on a pillow. If your mattress is not firm enough, place a board between the box spring and the mattress.
- Maintain a healthy weight and get regular moderate exercise, as a lack of exercise can cause back pain. Activities that are good for the back include swimming, cycling, walking, and rowing.
- By seeing your chiropractor regularly, the mobility of the joints and flexibility of the muscles will be improved and maintained in the long term. This will play a key role in preventing your back from becoming sore in the first place.

Finally, if you have been suffering from back pain for quite some time (chronic pain), your chiropractor should check you right away. Do not wait for it to simply "go away". If the problem were going to go away on its own, it would have already.