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

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## Using An Exercise Ball

More and more people are starting to use an exercise ball as a major component of their regular exercise program. The advantage of the exercise ball is that it introduces an element of physical effort that doesn't occur when doing an exercise while seated or standing. Since your feet are not firmly planted on the ground when you use an exercise ball, the body naturally and automatically responds to this instability by engaging the core muscles, both those in the abdominals and back and in the pelvic floor and hips. Over time, the core muscles strengthen, resulting in better posture, improved balance and enhanced athletic ability.

Furthermore, the small but constant spinal movements that occur in order to maintain your balance while using the exercise ball helps increase and maintain the overall mobility of the joints within the spine. As well, it is thought that these small but constant movements may help reduce pain by stimulating the body to produce higher amounts of natural pain inhibitors.

According to the Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, adding a stability ball to your sit-up and back-extension routine could boost your core stability in as few as 5 weeks. In the study, 30 women performed daily abdominal and back exercises on a stability ball or on the floor for 5 weeks. While tests of muscles that control balance and stability showed nearly across-the-board improvement, those using the ball significantly outscored the floor group.

When choosing an exercise ball, it is important to buy the right size ball and maintain the proper air pressure. The firmer the ball, the more difficult the exercise will be. The softer the ball, the less difficult the exercise will be. If you are overweight, an older adult, generally de-conditioned, or just beginning a fitness routine, you may want to consider using a larger, softer ball. The size of the ball is also important. When sitting on the ball, make sure your hips are level or just slightly higher than the knees.

The following are general guidelines for buying the right size stability ball:

- If you are under 4'6", use a 30 cm (12 inches) ball.
- If you are 4'11" – 5'4", use a 45 cm (18 inches) ball.
- If you are 5'1"-5'7", use a 55 cm (22 inches) ball.
- If you are 5'8"-6'2", use a 65 cm (26 inches) ball.
- If you are over 6'2", use a 75 cm (30 inches) ball.

Before using a stability ball, ask your doctor of chiropractic to help you develop an individualized program and teach you proper technique. As well, it is also important to have your chiropractor assess your spine to be sure that the joints within it have adequate mobility to do the exercises.