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

Costovertebral Joint Pain

Every week I have someone come into the office with varying degrees of pain in his or her middle back (thoracic spine). However, there is one type of middle back pain that is quite unique. It usually occurs only on one side of the spine and is felt in the area between the spine and one of the shoulder blades. The severity can range from mild and only present with certain movements to acutely painful when even taking a breath. In severe cases, a person can feel pain referring down the same side arm and around to the chest, mimicking the pain felt during a heart attack!

This type of back pain is most often caused by an injured or "locked" costovertebral joint. These joints are where the ribs attach to the side of the spine. These joints have to be able to move freely as the spine and thorax of the body bend forward, backward, and sideways. If one or more of these joints become stiff or locked, then you will feel a kink or sharp pain at that area during even simple upper body movements. Usually present with this problem is acute muscle spasm of the shoulder blade and neck muscles on the same side. This may prevent you from turning your head to the same side.

What causes this problem. For most people it is poor posture and inactivity that puts a chronic pressure on the mid back. Over time, the joints become stiff and vulnerable to lock up with even the simplest of tasks. An acute injury such as lifting while reaching or twisting can also have the same result.

The only real long-term solution for this problem is to restore proper motion to the affected joints and relieve some of the associated muscle spasm. This is accomplished by chiropractic manipulation to restore motion to the joints. In conjunction with this, many chiropractors use "trigger point therapy", or apply specific pressure to the knots within the spastic muscles. Simply taking muscle relaxers and painkillers for this problem over the long term is not a solution. It may give relief of the pain and muscle spasm, but it will not restore proper motion to the joints. Thus, the problem is likely to occur again whenever the region is challenged. Once the mobility of the costovertebral joints is restored, it is up to the patient to remain active to maintain it that way. In situations where a person's job requires prolonged daily standing or sitting with little activity, a

monthly chiropractic treatment may required to help maintain the mobility of the mid back.