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

Being Overweight is Not Good For Your Back

It is common knowledge that being overweight is not good for your back or your overall health. Even with that in mind, over forty percent of the general population is overweight enough to be considered clinically obese.

As with any Chiropractor's office, I have patients who enter my office repetitively over the years for acute low back pain. Although the specific incidents or accidents that resulted in them having acute low back pain are usually very different for each patient, there is often a common characteristic among a many of them. I am referring to the patients who are in the clinically obese category. Many people do not realize that being overweight makes them much more prone to experiencing acute low back pain. Being overweight also increases the likelihood that they will eventually have significant osteoarthritis in their lower back, hips, knees, and ankles as a result of the increased daily pressure on these joints.

When an obese person, or even a pregnant female, is carrying a lot of extra weight, the low back is put under much greater stress than normal. The pressure on the joints, muscles, disks, and ligaments is dramatically increased. Also, when a person is overweight, their level of activity is generally lower than if they were not overweight. When one combines an inactive lifestyle with the increased body weight, the low back problems will be amplified even further.

When sitting or standing, the gravitational forces on a large abdomen or midsection will pull it in a forward and downward direction. This is just simply gravity not working in one's favor. To compensate for this, we have to lean backward with our lower and upper back. The force of us leaning backwards counteracts the force of the abdomen pulling forward. Unfortunately, when we lean backwards, the concave curve in the low back is increased dramatically. This compresses the joints in the lower back and reduces how much the individual joints are able to move. The more compressed the joints are, the more likely they are to become stiff or even injured during what should normally be an easy task. If this is combined with a lack of exercise, the muscles are generally deconditioned and are not able to assist in supporting the back.

The "disks" are located between each of the vertebrae of the spine. They are made up of a ligament material and have a center of "jelly-like fluid". After long periods of increased compression force from bearing the extra weight, the disks begin to wear out. At first, they acquire little tears in the ligament material. Then they begin to lose their thickness and their ability to act as shock absorbers. This can be viewed on a x-ray as the space between the vertebrae being decreased. When enough little tears in the disk have occurred, the jelly-like material begins to push outwards from the center and form a bulge in the disk. This is called a "bulged" disc. If unlucky enough, the nerves exiting from the spinal cord will become pinched. This will eventually lead to an array of symptoms, all of which usually include lots of pain.

To prevent this from happening in your back, there are two things you must first address. Firstly, you have to lose the extra weight you are carrying by exercising regularly and eating healthy so that the number of calories you burn in a day are more than number of calories you consume. When you lose the extra weight, the pressure on your back decreases and the excess curvature in your spine lessens. The second thing you must do is to strengthen your "core" muscles. When you do specific exercises, the muscles in your abdominal and lower back region will become stronger and support the ligaments and joints in the lower back even that much more.

If you continue to not participate in regular exercise and not get the weight problem under control, the lower back pain and eventual arthritis will inevitably occur. I would also suggest that if you need to make changes in your diet, you pursue the services of the local dietitian at the hospital. She will be able to help you choose the foods that are lower in calories so that the total amount or number of calories you consume in a day will decrease. I would also recommend that you seek the services of a certified personal trainer. He or she can design an exercise program for you that meet your specific needs, such as a large cardiovascular endurance component. Simply lifting weights will not allow you to burn enough calories and achieve your weight loss goals. You have to do exercise that increases your heart rate and maintains it there for longer periods of time. Once you have made the appropriate changes to your diet and have commenced your exercise program, your back may still require a little assistance. A Chiropractor is well trained to get those stiff and tight joints in your lower back moving smoothly and freely again. Also, it is a good idea that you let your medical doctor know that you are starting an exercise program and to see if he or she has any objections or concerns.

In closing, it is important that you know that the changes in your lifestyle that I am talking about are for the long-term and not for the short-term. If you are successful, not only will you experience less severe and less frequent back pain, you'll also feel healthy and able to accomplish more physical activities than you were able to before.