

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"

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 and this number is rising every year, even in children.

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 can result in low back pain are usually very different for each patient, there is often a common characteristic among many of them. I am referring to the patients who are in the clinically obese category and have a large percentage of their body fat stored in their abdominal region. This is a serious problem and I always encourage them to address it. When an obese male, or even a pregnant female, is carrying a lot of extra weight at their abdominal region, 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. If there is a lack of exercise in a person's lifestyle, a low back problem will be amplified even further.

When sitting or standing, the gravitational forces on a large abdomen will pull it in a forward and downward direction. This is just simply gravity not working in our 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, which reduces their individual mobility. 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 abdominal 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 "herniated" disc. If unlucky enough, the nerves exiting from the spinal cord will become pinched. This will eventually lead to an array of symptoms, such as sciatica, which commonly include lots of pain.

To prevent this from happening in your back, there are three things you must first address. Firstly, you have to lose the extra weight you are carrying in your abdominal region. This will take the pressure off your back and decrease the excess curvature in your spine. The second thing you must do is exercise regularly so that the number of calories you burn in a day is more than number of calories you consume. Also, when you exercise, the muscles in your abdominal lower back region will become stronger and support the ligaments and joints in the lower back even that much more. The third item you should is to see your chiropractor so that he or she can restore the proper mobility of the joints in your low back

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 more healthy and able to accomplish more physical activities than you were able to before.