



for Food Service

Watch Your Back

We don't think very much about our backs—that is, until they start to hurt. Many of us are experiencing back pain which is now one of the most common medical complaints in the U.S. The good news is that, in many cases, back pain can be prevented. Here are 10 ways to maintain a healthy back according to the American Council on Exercise.

1. **Maintain a healthy weight.** Excess weight tends to creep up slowly, so we may not be aware of how it affects us. But try carrying a 20-pound pack on your back all day and you'll have a better idea of how extra weight takes a toll on the whole body.
2. **Strengthen the abdominal and back muscles.** Strengthening the abdominals really does help protect the back. In fact, a strong core—which includes all the muscles of the trunk—is important for avoiding injury, whether you're cleaning your house, playing tennis or sitting at a desk all day.
3. **Lift items properly.** Protect your back when lifting anything by standing close to the object with your feet apart to give you a stable base. Squat down while keeping the spine in proper alignment and contract your abdominals as you lift using your legs.
4. **Strengthen the leg muscles.** Along with the core muscles, the leg muscles play a vital role in helping you maintain good posture and body mechanics. And strong leg muscles can take much of the burden off the back when you're lifting heavy items.
5. **Stay flexible.** Inflexibility in the form of tight hamstrings and a limited range of motion in the trunk can increase your risk of injury or make existing back pain worse. Some forms of exercise, such as yoga, Pilates and tai chi, may help relieve or prevent back pain by increasing flexibility and reducing tension. These exercises should not be done, however, if they are uncomfortable or place a strain on the back.
6. **Maintain good posture.** Correct posture and body mechanics play a vital role in preventing back pain because pressure on the discs and strain of the muscles, ligaments and back joints is aggravated by incorrect posture and body mechanics. When your posture is good and you move your body correctly, you reduce the strain on your back.
7. **Buy a comfortable mattress.** Most of us spend a good deal of time in bed, which is why a good mattress is such a wise investment. Remember—what works for one person may not work for you so take the time to find the mattress that suits your needs.
8. **Reduce stress.** Stress increases tension in all your muscles including your back. Reduce or better manage your stress and you may literally feel as if the weight has been lifted from your shoulders.
9. **Warm up before activity.** Beginning any activity with cold muscles and joints puts you at risk for injury. Jumping right into intense activity increases your risk of injury, so take the time to get your muscles and joints warm and limber first.
10. **Support the lower back when sitting.** Use a rolled towel, small pillow or use a chair with good lumbar support. After sitting for a prolonged period, straighten your back to an upright position and, if possible, stand and walk around to give your back a break.