

ADVICE FOR MILD BACKACHES

First of all, know that any back pain associated with an acute injury or trauma like an auto accident or a fall from a height should be checked out in the emergency room before assuming all is okay. You should also be checked out for back pain by the emergency room if you can't walk, the pain begins to shoot into the buttock or back of the thigh, significantly interferes with your sleep, or is associated with a fever.

Common back pain oftentimes occurs in teenagers. It usually causes pain in the middle or lower part of the back, where the muscles on either side of the spine are tender or in spasm. The pain is often worsened by bending. Often the triggering event is carrying something too heavy, lifting from an awkward position, or overexertion of back muscles (for example, from digging).

Ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) can be taken three or four times a day. Continue this until 24 hours have passed without any pain. This is the most important part of the therapy because back pain causes muscle spasm and these medicines can greatly reduce both the spasm and the pain.

During the first two days of an acute back pain, try a cold-pack wrapped in a towel applied to the painful area for 10 minutes every hour or so; this usually numbs the nerves in the area somewhat. After the first two days, a heating pad or hot water bottle applied to the most painful area helps to relieve muscle spasm. Do this whenever the pain flares up. The most comfortable sleeping position is usually on your side; avoid sleeping on your abdomen since this stresses the back. The mattress should be firm or reinforced with a board if necessary. Avoid lifting, jumping, horseback riding, motorcycle riding, and heavy exercise until you are completely well. Complete bed rest is usually unnecessary. Use good posture, and avoid slouching in the chair while at school. Avoid wearing a backpack with heavy books until you are well.

Spinal manipulation can be very helpful in select cases after the worst of the acute spasms have passed.

The only way to prevent future backaches is to keep your back muscles in excellent physical condition. This will require 5 minutes of back and abdominal exercises per day. Helpful strengthening exercises are sit-ups, 6-inch leg raises, flattening the back against the floor, and tucks of the leg to the chest. Also perform stretching exercises. The strengthening exercises should be avoided when you have active back pain; however, the stretching exercises should be continued. Free weights are a common source of back pains in teenagers. We suggest you use a Nautilus-type machine at the gym instead. Going to the gym can also help with weight reduction which can also help.

Remember to lift objects with your leg muscles and not by bending or twisting your back. Lift heavy items straight ahead - not off to one side - so that the forces are equal on your back.

Call us for an appointment if your back pain is not improving after three days.