

## AVOIDING LOWER BACK PAIN

Statistically, 80% of people experience back pain on a moderate to severe pain level over the course of a lifetime. There are two critical times that you are at a higher risk for injury.

One is upon awaking in the morning. Your back is swollen at this time, as your discs have extra fluid in them from not being compressed and active for a prolonged period. A forward bend or twist at this time can afflict potential damage to your discs or other soft tissue and skeletal structures of your back. The second critical time is after sitting for long periods such as on a plane trip, long drive, or simply working at your desk. During this phase of being upright and placing pressure on your discs, your ligaments and tendons lengthen into position that you have been sitting. This is called "creep". The ligaments and tendons are not in a position to properly protect your disc and nerve structures and you can place them at risk. The longer you are sitting, the more they lengthen.

The worst scenario is getting up from lying down and then sitting for prolonged periods. At this time you have swollen disc structures that are nearer to your nerves and you have "creep", which makes the nerve more susceptible to being impinged, leading to the onset of back pain.

There are things you can do to make these critical times better. When you awake in the mornings, or get up from sitting for periods longer than 30 minutes, walk around for a couple minutes to increase circulation to the areas of swollen disc structures. This helps disperse the fluids that have accumulated there. Move slowly at first, and try to limit large movements, to avoid straining any of the musculature of the back or extremities that have not warmed up yet. Think of muscles like taffy. Cold taffy is stiff, and when you try to bend it, it ends up cracking or breaking. Warm taffy, as you know is very pliable and can move and stretch beyond their original length without tearing. This is the same for your muscles. This is why you should warm up your muscles prior to stretching before or before any type of moderate to heavy activities.

If you have been sitting for a longer period of time, do not bend forward quickly, as this puts the back at a greater risk for injury. Try and bend backwards or extend your compressed spine by sitting up and extend your head straight up, as you are trying to touch the ceiling or sky with your head. These motions take you just a few seconds, but go a long way in minimizing the risk of damage and pain to your back. The longer you have been sitting, the longer you should spend decompressing.

Having a strong core also greatly decreases the risk of lower back injuries and/or symptoms. You can add a simple exercise while you are sitting. Press the curve of your lower back against the seat back of your chair and hold for a few seconds. Try to build up to 60 seconds at a time. This can easily be done over the course of waiting at a red light or when stuck in traffic. Perform this periodically during the day to help increase the muscle tone of you lower back and abdomen, which help to add protection to your vulnerable nerve and disc structures. Visit [www.destinymgmt.com/Training-Nutrition.html](http://www.destinymgmt.com/Training-Nutrition.html) for more exercises.

W. Anthony Yoshino DC, CSCS