

# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## PROTECTING YOUR BACK AT WORK

Back pain is one of the most common medical problems in the United States. The cause is often poor posture and body mechanics in the workplace. A supervised program of back protection and exercise may be the key to alleviating and even preventing such problems.

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. At the same time, when your posture is good and you move your body correctly, you reduce the strain on your back.

### **SITTING DOWN ON THE JOB**

Sitting is often the greatest cause of back pain. When sitting either in a relaxed position, driving, or while at work, support your lower back. Use a rolled towel, small pillow, or a specially designed seat support, available at medical supply stores. Remove this low back support every half hour for five minutes to give your lower back a change of position. Your head should be positioned so that your ear is in a line with your shoulder and your chin is parallel with the floor.

Avoid leaning to one side when you are sitting, and avoid overstuffed furniture as it does not offer adequate support.

When working at a desk, your chair should be pulled close to the desk. An office chair with short arm rests will allow this. Office chairs should also have

adjustable height, back rests and seats. The back rest spring should be adjusted so that the back rest moves with you. A seat that tilts forward is a particularly useful feature.

Use a swivel chair to enable you to work without twisting your back. Place objects such as adding machines and computers as close to you as possible to minimize the amount of twisting and turning you need to do.



When you lean forward at your desk, bend forward at the hips instead of rounding your lower back. This will allow you to keep your back straight and in good alignment.

### **TALKING ON THE PHONE CAN BE A PAIN IN THE NECK**

Holding the phone between your ear and shoulder is a common cause of neck pain. Use a clipboard to hold your papers down so that your hands are free. Special phone adapters also are available.

After sitting for a prolonged period, it is helpful to straighten your back to an upright position and, if possible, stand and walk for awhile.

### **DON'T FORGET EXERCISE**

Appropriate exercise, done regularly, will provide the strength and flexibility in the muscles of your legs and back that you need to help avoid excessive strain and possible injury. Some forms of exercise, such as yoga 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. And don't neglect strength training; strong abdominal, back and leg muscles play a vital role in helping you maintain good posture and body mechanics.

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