

supports the small of the back, and puts your knees slightly higher than your hips. An arm-chair allows you to rest your arms, which will take additional pressure off the muscles of your back.

A specially designed backrest with support for your low back (lumbar) region may be needed. A pillow above your buttocks also works. A small footrest that boosts your knees higher than your hips is helpful. When driving, move the car seat forward to accomplish this.

**When Bending or Lifting**—NEVER bend from the waist with locked knees. If you want to reach something on or near the floor, flex your knees and squat down slowly. Keep your back as straight and natural as possible. To lift something, squat down as close to the object as possible, grasp it firmly, and rise up slowly, letting your leg muscles (not your back) do the work.

**When Playing**—strengthen your back muscles with sports that call for endurance and provide conditioning, such as walking, bicycling, and most styles of swimming. Without proper conditioning and warm-ups, however, some sports like various weight-lifting activities, rotation sports (like tennis and golf), and back-arching sports (like basketball and some swimming strokes) can stress the spine.

**When Lying Down**—though a recliner or contour chair that puts your knees higher than your hips can be relaxing, if you have a backache, this can actually make it worse. Lying on the floor with your knees slightly flexed and a cushion under the head is great for the back.

When sleeping, the best positions for your back are on your side with knees slightly flexed or on your back, preferably with a pillow to elevate your knees. Sleeping on your stomach is not good for your back.

References for this pamphlet available at:  
[www.fcfer.org/Reference/9678A.htm](http://www.fcfer.org/Reference/9678A.htm)

*Compliments of your Doctor of Chiropractic*

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# Back Pain



**A**ccording to the American Chiropractic Association, 31 million Americans have low back pain at any given time, half of Americans suffer from back pain every year, and one-third of Americans over the age of 18 had pain severe enough to require professional care in the past 5 years.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, back pain is the second leading cause of lost work-days, with an estimated 100 million lost work-days lost per year, and work-related back injuries are the number one occupational hazard in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

At some time during our lives, 80 percent of us can expect to have back pain.<sup>1</sup>

There's really nothing new about backaches. In fact, the potential for back troubles would almost seem to be built into the spine. As intricate and magnificent a design as our spines are, it is still better suited to a horizontal position than a vertical one. When humans stand erect, the downward pull of gravity causes pressure and wear-and-tear on the vertebrae and discs separating them. It also strains the back's muscles and the ligaments that hold the spine in position.

But we can't just blame gravity—we are primarily responsible for our back troubles. Most of us don't keep our spines in proper physical condition. We exercise erratically (if at all) and without adequate warm up or cool down. We gain too much weight and develop potbellies and swaybacks that put added strain on our backs. We sprawl on soft chairs and sofas. We subject our backs to unnecessary pressures, twists, and jolts by bending and lifting things improperly.

Thus, we injure already weakened back muscles and sometimes throw off the spinal alignment. Severe stress can cause the actual tearing of muscles or ligaments, causing instant, acute pain. Even more frequent is the muscle spasm, which may "lock up" the back

and produce agonizing pain. Emotional stress, with its muscle tension, also causes spasms in the back.

### ***What Causes Low Back Pain?***

Doctors of Chiropractic will tell you that the most common causes of low back pain—among more than 100 identified—are muscle and ligament injuries, injuries to facet joints, disc problems, and vertebral subluxation (defined as "a complex of functional and/or structural and/or pathological changes that compromise neural integrity and may influence organ system function and general health").

Facet joints help connect the vertebrae to each other, allowing the spine to move easily while keeping it from bending too much. Facet joint problems occur when the facets grind against each other or when they produce bony spurs, irritating nerves and causing pain.

"Slipped disc" is a misnomer for the degenerative disc condition we all face sooner or later. Spinal discs are positioned between vertebrae and provide cushioning shocks when we bend, twist, or receive a jolt. But gravity, aging, and wear-and-tear, may rob discs of some of their elasticity, causing them to become weaker and partially collapse or bulge out, impinging upon a nerve root. In a few cases the disc ruptures.

Subluxations are spinal joints that don't move properly within their normal range of motion or are out of alignment.

### ***How is Back Pain Diagnosed and Treated?***

The specialized training and clinical experience of Doctors of Chiropractic qualify them to conduct a sharply focused physical examination that may include orthopedic and

neurological tests, posture and gait analysis, static and motion palpation (examination by touch), and x-rays if clinically necessary. This thorough chiropractic examination enables the Doctor of Chiropractic to provide a differential diagnosis, pinpoint the abnormalities causing the pain, and outline a treatment plan.

Relieving the pain is the first goal of chiropractic treatment. The second objective is to correct and normalize spinal segment relationships and thus relieve the resulting nerve, muscular, and vascular disturbance. A third goal is to prevent recurrence.

Doctors of Chiropractic use spinal manipulation or adjustment as their primary treatment method. These precise, delicate maneuvers require a great deal of skill, training, and experience, and should only be performed by highly trained professionals. And spinal manipulation has proved effective in numerous scientific studies. In fact, spinal manipulation was recommended as a first line of treatment for acute low back pain by the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, an arm of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Using Your Back Wisely***

**When Standing**—maintain a natural "pelvic tilt" posture with your head up, your back straight but relaxed (not military style), shoulders even, stomach tightened, buttocks tucked under, and knees slightly flexed. If you are standing for a long time, rest one foot on a box or step to prevent your lower back from sagging.

**When Sitting**—avoid low, soft chairs and sofas. Choose a chair that is fairly straight,