

Dealing with Back Pain

Belper's registered osteopath, Ian Rumboldt gives 30 tips to cope with and avoid back pain. Firstly, back pain is not 'A Normal' occurrence. Pain is your body complaining that something harmful is happening. The 'Grin and Bear It' attitude may be admirable but it may be putting your future in jeopardy. These tips, of course, are not meant to replace medical advice from your GP or registered osteopath, which I always advise you to seek, however with common sense they should be useful.

Now here are my tips.

1. **DO's and DON'T's** – Generally speaking, if it hurts, do not do it. If it relieves pain, do it.
2. **PAINKILLERS** – May be OK for five days but if you have been taking painkillers for longer without seeking medical advice, ring a practitioner. Remember pain is there to stop you damaging yourself. The side effects of anti-inflammatories can kick in from Day 1. Do not exceed the dosage. Always take with food. Natural painkillers now exist and offer a much safer approach. Available from **Belper Natural Health Centre**
3. **ICE** – For acute strains apply a bendy ice pack (or frozen peas) immediately through light material for 3-4 minutes. Repeat every hour for 4 hours. Ice limits inflammation. Acute strains are where you have definitely wrenched, jarred or banged yourself.
4. **HEAT** – For chronic (long term) muscular problems use a hot water bottle through clothing.
5. **COLLARS AND CORSETS** – For whiplash always use a foam collar for a day at least unless otherwise advised by a professional; corsets for low back pain use only 'as and when'. Constant use will weaken your back muscles.
6. **CONSTIPATION** – Can exacerbate low back pain. Drink lots of water and either eat a fibrous
7. **SNEEZING AND COUGHING** – Unload weight if possible and brace yourself by grasping something or somebody solid first! A common cause of acute back pain.
8. **BED REST** – Is necessary for acute disc strains producing sharp leg pain and a few other conditions. Most back pain is eased by movement, however, and bed rest will just prolong the agony. If you have sciatica or low back pain try putting a pillow under your knees or lie on your good side.
9. **BEDS** – Hard beds are something of a myth. Medium firm beds are much better for most people. Foam or pocket sprung mattresses suit most back problems best. The more springs per square foot the better. It is a 'rule of thumb' guide to quality. Spend as much as you can – we spend ••• to 1/3 of our lives in bed. If you have agonising back pain, I still wouldn't advise lying on the floor. I have seen too many injuries where people are trying to get up from the floor.
10. **CHAIRS** – Most sofas are designed by six foot men for six foot men. The most common faults are too soft, too deep for length of thigh, too low, and the back isn't tall enough. Do not expect a sofa to be comfortable for both partners. If you have a chronic back problem, get a chair with lumbar support (or buy an additional lumbar support), get a chair with two arms to push yourself up from. If you have an acute lumbar disc problem, then do not sit.

11. **CARS** – Choose a car for its seat first and looks second. You won't be able to see it whilst you're driving but you'll feel every bend in the road with a poor seat. If you have an uncomfortable seat, buy a foam lumbar support. Get out at each service station and walk (carefully avoiding cars). Prolonged sitting is terrible for neck and back problems. Belper Natural Health Centre sells several types of lumbar support.
12. **LIFTING** – Bend your hips and knees, not your back. (Pretend you are going to sit on a low stool). Hug weight to your tummy. Keep your knees and chest pointing in the same direction. Lifting and twisting is the way most disc problems are caused, so don't do it.
13. **PILLOWS**-Try to get support under your neck not your head. Talk to your osteopath about moulded foam pillows: 'Orthopaedic pillows'. 'Royal Rest' and 'Tempur' pillows are available from the **Belper Natural Health Centre**.
14. **HIATUS HERNIA** – If you have one, lifting yourself up with pillows will give you a neck problem. Get someone else to raise the head end of your bed using blocks by 3 to 4 inches. This will diminish acid reflux by using gravity.
15. **GARDENING** – Buy extra long fork, rake, hoe and spade handles, swap jobs, do not do the same thing continuously, and rest. Wear a long shirt so your low back doesn't get chilled. Do not lift crazy things. The most common injury is caused when moving heavy plant pots. If kneeling use knee pads.
16. **SPORT** – If you have a chronic low back problem, these are the low risk sports/leisure activities: walking, cycling, table tennis, yoga, bowls, swimming (but if you have spondylosis or osteoarthritis breast stroke may hurt, so try back stroke), jogging (use air-cushioned soles. Grass is less compressive than roads). If jogging causes sciatica, stop jogging. Please warm up before all sports. If you have ever had sciatica, squash is a high risk sport. It may cause damage to discs.

Mainly for Women

17. NAPPIES – Change your baby on your bed, not the floor.
18. SLINGS – Back carriers are easier on your back than front loaders!
19. BREASTFEEDING – Is easier if you sit back in a tall chair. Try to keep your head vertical. Do not constantly look down.
20. CONCEPTION – Try and get your back fixed before you conceive. Believe me, if you don't, this paragraph will dance before your eyes for 9 months.
21. MONTHLY CYCLE – You are more likely to strain your back within 3 days of your period, as the ligaments loosen. Reserve heavy work for later in the month.
22. COTS – Either buy one with drop sides or consider sleeping with your baby or move slowly and be careful. Cots cause problems to new mums very frequently. Leaning forwards, downwards and reaching is a common onset for back problems
23. OVENS – When you buy a new one, think about a higher level oven or squat when using the oven.
24. MAKING BEDS – Kneel if you have good knees.
25. IRONING – Try standing with one leg on 1 or 2 telephone directories, swap legs. You may find one of these two ways feels better.
26. HAIRDRESSERS – If you have a worn neck, lean forwards into the basin. If leaning back caused dizziness, never do it again.
27. OFFICE WORKERS – If your low back aches, try a foam sitting wedge to correct your posture. Get desks and seats to the correct height. Foam wedges are available from the **Belper Natural Health Centre**.
28. SHOPPING – Use 2 bags, balanced in each hand. Consider a small rucksack-type bag. If filling a shopping trolley, use several bags to ease lifting each bag into the car boot.
29. PREGNANCY – Taking folic acid tablets will protect your baby's spine from certain birth defects. Talk to your GP.
30. OSTEOPOROSIS – Studies have now shown that mineral tablets will help women who gradually lose bone density. Calcium, Magnesium and Vitamin D are the most obvious supplements. If Osteoporosis comes on suddenly at menopause, then consult your GP. Solgar 'Ultimate Bone Support' is available from the **Belper Natural Health Centre**.

I hope these 30 tips help, but do remember they are not meant to replace professional advice from your GP or regular qualified practitioner.

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