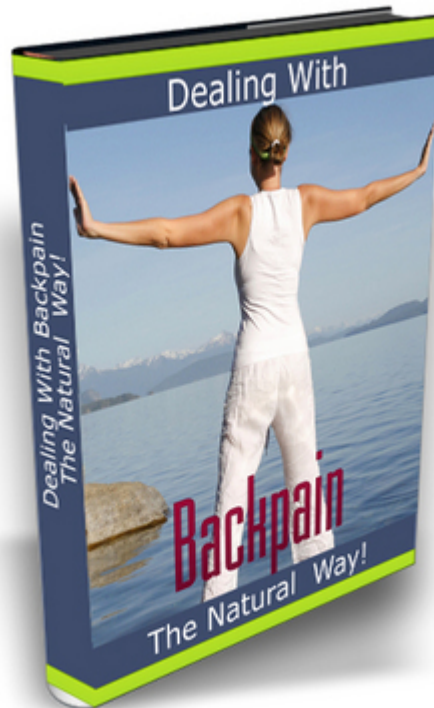


Dealing With Your Back Pain The Natural Way

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Introduction

As we move through the early years of the new century, the pace of life is becoming ever more frantic. With every passing day, there seems to be more to do than there ever was before. At the same time, there is little doubt that the pressure of modern life is likely to keep on increasing rather than falling away and allowing us to relax in the way that we would probably all like to.

Because life is becoming ever more frantic and stressful, there can be little doubt that the stresses and strains on your body are also increasing on a daily basis.

It is little surprise that so many people are plagued with constant niggles, aches and pains. Indeed, some unfortunate people are forced to suffer their pain in silence, trying to live a life that is as normal as possible.

Of course, because most people do not find themselves in this situation, they probably give very little thought or perhaps no thought at all to the pummeling that their body takes daily. That is likely to continue until some kind of body pain hits, and from that point on, pain becomes a very real and important consideration in their life.

Some forms of pain are less serious than others, and many types of pain will come and go. However, not all pain complaints can be so easily dismissed and amongst those that are most commonly felt and painfully endured is back pain.

It is estimated that between 50 million and 80 million US citizens suffer from chronic pain (defined as a pain that has lasted for more than six months), and that this costs over \$100

billion in social costs every year.

Back pain is one of the most common reasons for people visiting their doctor or medical practitioner.

Indeed, it has been estimated that as many as four out of every five people in the world will have to consult a medical professional at some point in their lives with a back pain problem.

For those who have never suffered back pain, it is possible that they can sympathize with those who are regular sufferers, but it is unlikely that they can truly appreciate the amount of pain and suffering that back pain brings.

Only a fellow back pain sufferer can truly sympathize and empathize with other sufferers who have been stricken with a similar problem to theirs. It is also relevant to note that the incidence of chronic back pain problems is on the increase, and that there are probably more sufferers nowadays than there have ever been at any previous time in history.

However, one indisputable fact is that anyone who has ever suffered from back pain, or (even worse) continues to do so knows just how much misery and suffering the condition can bring. These people would do almost anything to try to find a non-invasive treatment or cure for their condition.

As with any medical condition, it is safer and therefore preferable to deal with back pain in a natural manner if possible, and that is the primary topic of this book.

What is back pain, and what causes it?

What is back pain?

Stating the obvious, back pain is a pain or discomfort that you feel in your back, with the most common form being pain or discomfort in the lower back area. Most importantly, it is an indication that there is something wrong with your back, usually something that is related to musculoskeletal problems.

The problem for most people that suffer back pain is that they never give it a moment's thought most of the time, because during those periods of their life they are not in pain.

However, as soon as the pain hits, it is a pain that they will feel almost irrespective of what they are doing. If they are walking or standing, they will be in pain, but even if they are sitting down in a favorite chair or lying down, the chances are that they will still feel the pain.

For anyone who is lucky enough to suffer back pain only intermittently, they will forget how much difficulty they were previously suffering after the pain has gone away again.

The complaint of lower back pain is one of the most common medical complaints known, and yet, because there are many possible causes, it can also be one of the most frustrating and difficult problems for both patients and their medical attendants to deal with.

The good news is that for most people, back problems do tend to be intermittent - meaning that they are likely to go away of their own volition given time. The amount of time will depend upon the condition itself, the severity of the pain and so on, but for most people, having a 'bad back' is a temporary problem.

It is generally believed that once you have suffered a back problem, you become more prone to suffering similar problems again in the future. It is for this reason that even an intermittent, temporary back problem can become a major difficulty for anyone who works in a profession where lifting is essential for them to fulfill the tasks of their job.

As an example, it can be a major career threat for anyone in the nursing profession to suffer a damaged back, because it is absolutely necessary for them to be able to help patients up from a prone position, which necessitates lifting.

What causes back pain?

A simple answer to this question is, it is probably your life that is causing your back pain problem. Using the previous nursing profession example, it is common for back problems to first blight nursing staff because they have made the mistake of lifting a heavier than average patient in the wrong way.

This gives one pointer to a primary cause of back pain for many people. They suffer such pain as a direct side effect of the life they lead, or, more specifically, they often suffer as a ‘side effect’ of the job that they do.

It is a fact that your lower back bears most of the weight of your upper body, and consequently, most back pain occurs as a result of using incorrect lifting techniques leading to strained back muscles and sprained ligaments. Alternatively, it is very common for these sorts of problems to be caused by an individual making a sudden, jarring movement that jolts their back and damages a muscle.

You may suffer a back spasm, or build up stress in a particular part of your back over a period of time that only needs the proverbial straw to break (or at least damage) your back.

Hence, if you have a back pain that you did not have yesterday, the first thing to suspect is that you did something yesterday to cause this pain. It does not need to be something that is particularly strenuous or difficult, and it is not always obvious what the root cause of your pain might be.

For example, it is a fact of modern life that more and more of us spend hours every day sitting at a desk in front of a computer. Unfortunately, your spine is not well designed for hours of physical inactivity sitting hunched over a computer keyboard, and it is therefore feasible that this single activity could be just as damaging to your back as would be lifting an over-heavy object.

It is for this reason that if you are deskbound and working in front of a computer, you should make an effort to stand at least once every hour, and if you can have a short wander round, that makes things even better. Even when you are sitting down, try to change your position and shift your body weight whenever possible, because it is the inactivity of not doing so that can adversely affect your back and cause pain.

A similar proviso would apply to any one who spends several hours a day behind the wheel of their car or truck. Take regular breaks, have a stroll about, and remember to shift your weight as regularly as possible while you are behind the wheel.

If you are unfortunate enough to wake up in the morning with a back pain, it is unlikely that you are going to be able to make the necessary changes to your daily routine immediately.

However, once the pain has abated, that is the time to make changes to your routine. Focus in particular on those aspects of your daily activities that might have caused the initial back problem.

While there are obviously specific medical conditions that cause back pain (we will consider these in the next section), more often than not intermittent back pain is caused by a specific aspect of your daily routine or lifestyle.

In this scenario, it should not be difficult to isolate exactly what has caused the problem for most people, and therefore it should also be easy to make the changes necessary to prevent the problem coming back again.

For most people, their bad back condition is only likely to last a few days or a couple of weeks at the outside. In this case, prevention of a re-occurrence is largely down to being able to pinpoint what caused your bad back in the first place, and making the necessary changes to ensure that the same situation does not arise again in the future.

Of course, there may be more to it than simply making a small change in your lifestyle.

For example, if you are seriously overweight, this fact significantly increases the chances of you suffering back pain. As your spine and lower back supports your body weight, there is simply too much weight for it to do so properly.

In this case, the only answer that is going to be effective in the longer term is to reduce your weight significantly. Unfortunately, this is not likely to be a speedy process, on the basis that if you are carrying enough excess weight to cause a back problem, it is likely to take some

time to shift that excess weight.

Similarly, if the cause of your current back pain problem was an accident (e.g. whiplash injuries from a motor vehicle accident), then you may have suffered long-term damage that is going to require a significant degree of medical treatment in order to effect a cure.

Obviously, no-one has a major accident deliberately, and therefore lifestyle changes are not going to address the root cause of the problem.

Medical causes of back pain

Lumbar muscle strains: Strains of the muscles in the lower back are by far and away the most common cause of back pain, and most of the back pain problems that we have already considered in this report would probably fall into this category.

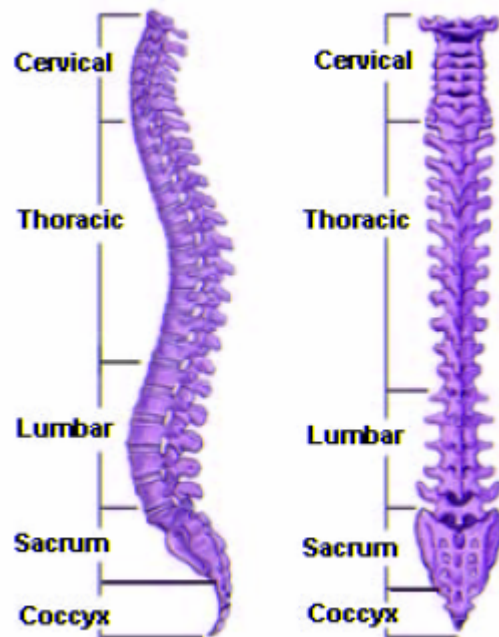
A muscle strain is a rip or a tear in the muscle fibers that is caused by sudden force.

Consequently, whilst there may be a single, sudden cause of such a strain, it is equally possible that there will be no single event upon which you can blame your condition. You could have strained your lumbar muscles lifting something that was too heavy or lifting it in the incorrect manner, but you could equally have caused the condition by sitting in a chair or even lying in your bed in an awkward manner.

The good news is, lumbar muscle strains will almost certainly go away quickly, and you will not necessarily be any more prone to a repeat ‘attacks’ after the strain has cleared up than is anyone else.

Alternatively, it is relatively common to suffer a back sprain, which is caused by an overstretching of one or more of the ligaments in your back. Whilst strains and sprains are therefore different conditions, they are generally treated in the same way when it comes to alleviating the pain caused by either condition.

Disc problems: The human spine runs down the centre of the back from the skull to the pelvis, and is comprised of 33 individual vertebrae. These vertebrae are categorized into four different groups as indicated in the screenshot:



In between each of these individual vertebrae you will find a small disc which is made up of a tough outer coating (the annulus), and a gel-like central interior (the nucleus pulposus). These discs are designed to act as ‘shock absorbers’ between each of the vertebrae which in turn enables your spine to flex, bend and move in a controlled manner while not causing you any discomfort or pain (under normal circumstances).

Quite clearly however, if any of the ‘shock absorbing’ discs have a problem, then the vertebrae of your spine are likely to knock together or jar one another, and this will often cause a great deal of pain.

One disc related condition that you may suffer from is a slipped disc.

This happens when the soft gel like interior of the disc pushes itself out through the tough outer coating - with two possible results, either of which may (but may not) cause you pain. Firstly, you no longer have a ‘shock absorber’ between your vertebrae, and secondly, the escaped gel-like substance may put additional pressure on your spinal-cord or the nerve cells

in that area, in which case, you will undoubtedly feel a great deal of pain.

However, it is important to note that, whether you feel pain or not, if the nucleus pulposus has escaped from a disc in your spine, then you have a slipped disc, irrespective of whether there is any pain or not.

Sometimes, you will suffer what is known as a ruptured (or herniated) disk which is pretty much the same as happens with a slipped disc. However, the phrase is most commonly used in connection with the lumbar and cervical vertebrae, primarily the former.

These are the five vertebrae that do most of the supporting work of the spine, and consequently the pressure on these particular vertebrae is considerable.

Again, you have a ruptured lumbar disc when the soft gel-like substance from inside the disc escapes through the tough outer coating of the disc.

As we get older, the discs in our spine become less pliable, so it therefore becomes increasingly likely that you will suffer a slipped or ruptured disc.

Sciatica: Sciatica is another relatively common form of back pain. This is a term that is used to describe a pain that not only affects the lower back, but also stretches down into the buttocks and legs. It results from irritation or overstimulation of a large nerve in the spinal column known as the sciatic nerve. Because sciatica is a pain that is associated with irritation of a particular nerve, it is a condition that can accompany other less serious back problems like muscle strains and ligament sprains.

Spinal stenosis: This is another condition that is associated with getting older. The spinal column itself can become more restrictive as a result of a condition like arthritis, and as a result it can put pressure on the spinal cord or surrounding nerves. In this case, pain is the almost inevitable result.

Osteoporosis: This is another condition that is generally associated with the ageing process, one in which the bones throughout the body get continually weaker due to reduced levels of calcium. Consequently, because the bones are gradually weakening, it is not uncommon to find osteoporosis has caused compression fractures of the vertebrae, particularly in older women.

Lumbar spine arthritis: Although it is likely that you are most familiar with arthritis as a medical condition that mainly affects external parts of the body such as the fingers, hands and toes, it is a fact that arthritis can attack any bone and joint in the body. Consequently, arthritis can attack the joints in the spine, making almost any kind of movement a very painful process.

Spondylolisthesis: When adjacent vertebrae in the spine become unstable because of a general degenerative condition in that area of the body, individual vertebrae can begin to shift their positions relative to one another. In this scenario, it is always possible that individual vertebrae will start grinding or rubbing against one another, and this will cause a great deal of back pain.

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