

Live Well to
Learn Well

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Many common, daily activities can lead to painful back problems. In order to prevent these issues it's important to:

- Maintain good overall physical condition.
- Avoid activities that hurt your back.
- Maintain proper posture, while sitting, standing, or lying down.
- Make a habit of stretching throughout the day.

Posture is key

Correct posture is important in the prevention of back strains and sprains. Maintaining the normal curves of the spine allows the supportive structures of the back to relax which minimizes the chances of injury. The following sections provide detailed advice on how to maintain proper posture throughout your everyday activities.

Sitting in a chair

- Use an extra back support when sitting in a chair to maintain the natural lumbar curve in the low back. (In most chairs, we end up slouching, placing excessive strain on the muscles, joints, and ligaments of the back.)
- Place a rolled-up towel, sweatshirt, or small pillow in the small of your back or wherever it is most comfortable.
- Remember to take something to stuff behind your back while sitting at the movies, riding in a car, working in the library or at a desk.
- Use a lumbar roll for back support (available at Physical Therapy, at the Cornell Health Pharmacy, and in many drug stores).
- Whether working at a computer or riding in a car for long periods, make sure to take frequent breaks from sitting.



Sitting on a stool or bench

Sit up straight and maintain your lumbar curve to avoid the stress that leads to back pain. An easy way to do this is to make sure you are sitting on your "sit bones" (ischial tuberosities). You can feel these bones in your bottom when you tilt your pelvis back and forth while sitting. You can maintain proper posture without back support if you keep your weight over your sit bones, your back erect, and your chest out. This may feel awkward at first because it involves postural muscles that you're unaccustomed to using. But within a week or so, good posture will become a new habit.



Maintaining proper posture is key.

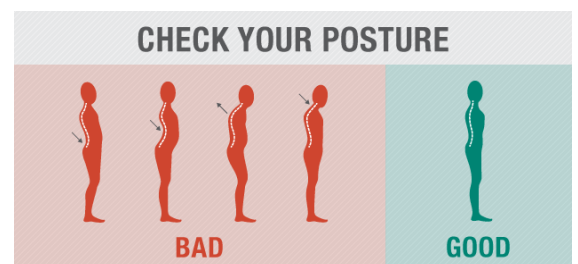
Sleeping

Use a firm mattress for sleeping. A feather pillow or rolled-up towel will support your neck when you are sleeping on your side or back. If your lower back needs additional support, consider adding a 1-1 ½ inch roll at the small of your back.

Standing

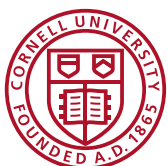
Slouching, letting your head and shoulders protrude forward, or keeping your knees locked straight back all add stress to your back and neck. To achieve proper posture, imagine there is a string attached to the top of your head which helps lift and elongate you. Make sure you keep your chest out and don't lift your chin.

Wear shoes with good arch support to keep proper skeletal alignment and distribute stress correctly. When standing for longer periods of time, try putting one foot up on a stool (or object of similar height). This will reduce some of the stress on your lower and middle back.



Lifting or moving objects

When lifting or putting down heavy objects, keep your back straight. Bend at the hips and knees, using the power of your legs to lift or lower the



object. Hold heavy objects close to the body. Center weight to minimize stress placed on back muscles. For example, wear a backpack over both shoulders instead of one to help reduce back stress.

When moving objects like furniture, push rather than pull so you can use the weight of your whole body instead of just your arm and back muscles.

Back stretches

Try the following exercises to help relieve back tension:

- 1. Backward stretch / Extension in standing:** A few times each day, get up and stretch leaning backwards. Brace yourself by placing your hands on the back of your hips. Repeat 10 times. Alternatively, spend a few minutes lying on your stomach on a firm surface while leaning on your elbows.



- 2. Press-up / Extension in lying:** Lie on your stomach on a firm surface with your palms on the floor directly under the shoulders. Press up with arms, keeping your lower body relaxed and hips and legs on the floor. Repeat 10 times twice a day. If you experience pain that increases with each repetition, do not continue the exercises.



Try to repeat one or both of these stretches a total of ten repetitions. four times a day.