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BE WELL

Surprising Reasons Why Your Back Hurts

By Debbie DeAngelo

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"Oh, my aching back!" If you've ever grimaced and uttered those words, you're not alone.

Back pain affects 80 percent of us during our lifetime and is one of the top reasons driving people to visit their doctor. Low back pain is extremely prevalent, but discomfort can occur anywhere between your neck and tailbone. Reasons abound for episodic and chronic back pain. Heavy lifting, sports injuries, accidents, and muscle strain are common triggers. Additionally, musculoskeletal problems may exist. On top of that, some of our routine habits contribute to our agony. And some of them may surprise you.

Watch Your Back. Back pain may seem to come from out of nowhere but that's rarely the case. Although a "back attack" can strike anyone – young or not-so-young, athlete or couch potato, male or female, a healthy body is less vulnerable to it and recovers faster when it does occur. Also, there are some overlooked choices and behaviors that can lead to a distressed spine. Here are a few you may want to pay attention to.

Fat Wallet Syndrome. Yes, this is a thing. Fat Wallet Syndrome is a condition resulting from a wallet in the back pocket compressing the sciatic nerve and the

glute muscles. Over the past few decades, men's wallets have become overstuffed with cards (credit, fuel, bank, grocery) and receipts. A thick wallet throws off the normal tilt of a man's pelvis while sitting. Subsequently, muscle spasms, numbness, and leg pain may occur. Fellas, thin out your wallet on a regular basis and remove it from your pocket when driving for prolonged periods.

Heavy Purse Syndrome. Now for the ladies ... lighten up your purse and tote bag. The average purse weighs in at six pounds. More than a bag of sugar. Lugging around this extra weight, especially on one side of the body, causes headaches, arm numbness, and neck and back pain. A heavy handbag can cause your shoulder to roll forward and down, which in turn places strain on your neck and upper back. Besides downsizing your purse and lightening the load, alternate the side of the body on which you carry it.

Sleep Position. If you wake up feeling achier than when you went to bed, then your sleep position may be to blame. Whether you're a side, back, or stomach sleeper, the goal is to maintain proper alignment of your neck and spine throughout the night.

When sleeping on your side, make sure your shoulder and entire side of your body make contact with the mattress and are in alignment with your ear. Place a pillow between your knees to keep your hips and back straight and your legs at the correct angle. To prevent muscle imbalance and soreness, avoid always sleeping on the same side of your body.

Slumbering on your back is considered to be optimal for your spine because your weight is evenly distributed across the body. It's crucial to place a pillow beneath your knees to keep the slight curve to your lower back. When resting your head on a pillow, select one that's thin. You may even benefit from one with extra padding along the bottom edge to support your neck.

Favor sleeping on your stomach? If you suffer from neck problems, this position isn't recommended because it places inordinate strain on your neck. It's essential to place a pillow under the pelvis to relieve the pressure on your lower back. Stomach sleepers don't typically need a pillow beneath their head; however, if you use one, be sure it's the thinnest possible.

Tech Neck. The human head weighs 10 to 12 pounds. When you bend your head down, your head becomes heavier for your neck to support. The lower the angle, the more pressure exerted on your vertebrae and muscles. For example, looking down at your cell phone at a 30-degree angle equates to 40 pounds of pressure on your neck. Now think about how long you remain this way while viewing your phone. Ouch!

Before you have an anxiety attack, I'm not suggesting that you give up your phone. I am, however, recommending that you make some postural changes when using your devices. Avoid cradling your phone between your ear and shoulder. When texting or viewing your screen, hold your phone up higher so it's compatible with your natural sightline. Use a stand for your phone or tablet that angles the screen toward you, so you don't have to look down as much. As for your computer, make sure the workstation is ergonomically correct. Last, but not least, take frequent device breaks and stretch your neck and back muscles.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debbie DeAngelo, RNC, BSN, is a holistic health coach, health correspondent for JET-TV and FOX 66 in Erie, Pennsylvania, and author of "Sudden Menopause." She is also a ballroom dance instructor. Debbie can be reached at debbie@healthonheels.com.



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