

# 5 Keys To Protect Your Spine

When it comes to your spine, most people want to protect it from injury and pain. This is because most everyone has experienced or knows someone who has experienced back pain. The statistic is that 90% of the American population will have at least one episode of back pain in their lives. This means that we are all vulnerable if we do not take the proper steps to care for our bodies. We will discuss 5 actions that you can take to reduce your risk of becoming a statistic.

## 1. Healthy Habits

Our bodies are wonderful machines capable of thousands of actions. However, performing those actions without proper mechanics can lead to breakdown of the joints and strains in the muscles. Using proper ergonomics during work or play will prevent injury. Ergonomics is the study of how the body functions in the working environment. Many adults use computer for work and home use. Spending hours focusing down at the screen with the arms out can wreak havoc on your neck and upper back. Be sure to sit up straight, elevate the computer screen to eye level and have the keyboard at elbow height when arms are at your side. These few changes made to your work station can save your joints a great amount of stress and strain.

Some activities we take for granted that we can do. Many of my patients will state that they barely moved or simply were picking a tissue off of the floor when the extreme pain hits them. This is because the less “difficult” the action is, the less thought we give it and the less likely we are to follow healthy habits.

Getting out of the chair, for example, can be done in a safe and proper way. Squatting by bending at the hips and knees to get in and out of a chair is best. You should rise straight up and not push forward. Do not let the back roll forward or hump up. Follow these easy steps: scoot to the edge of the chair, place one foot under thighs, bend elbows and use arm rest to push directly up. These steps will reduce painful pressure in the low back.

Lifting is another action that can get us into trouble with our spines. Even those of us who do not do heavy lifting still may have to pick up a grocery bag or basket of laundry. Even these small tasks when done incorrectly can lead to a bout of excruciating back pain. When lifting always bend at the knees and not at the waist. Squatting or stooping reduces the pressure on the lumbar spine or low back. Position yourself square in front of what you are picking up. Pull the object as close to your body as possible and hold it there. Stand straight up and elevate the object with you. Do not twist as you lift. The object must go beside you move your feet as opposed to twisting through the spine. Avoid lifting first thing in the morning. Your spine is more prone to injury then.

Driving is another activity that we may take the technique for granted. The recommended posture will support the neck and low back. Pull seat up so that knee are bent slightly greater than 90 degrees. Elbows should be comfortably to your side and slightly extended. Seat back should be upright with the back of your head touching the headrest. If your range of motion in the neck is preventing you from turning fully when driving stay tuned for the “stretching” portion of this article.

## 2. Stretching

Stretching is a great practice regardless of your activity level. Performing stretches multiple times

throughout the day not only loosens tight and sore muscles but also reduces tension on the spinal column. Stretching actually reduces stress on the entire skeleton. These stretches improve range of motion and decrease stiffness. Look at the end of the article for three very useful stretches for the low back, hips and neck.

### **3. Strengthen the Spine**

A weak spine leads to early breakdown and degeneration of the joints. Degeneration can lead to all sort of painful back conditions including disc herniations, arthritis and even fracture. No matter your age or fitness level it is crucial that we all perform strengthening exercises. These exercises can be tailored to you. A chiropractor can help you learn these procedures and ensure that you are doing them correctly. The core muscle group is the most important when it comes to spinal health, particularly in the lumbar or low back region. The pelvic floor, diaphragm, transverse abdominis and spinal muscles comprise the core. These muscles can be strengthened with minimal effort exercises. Kegals strengthen the pelvic floor. The diaphragm is strengthened with deep breathing techniques. The transverse abdominis muscles is contracted with the Valsalva maneuver or bearing down and hold it for 5 seconds. The spinal muscles are activated with a posterior pelvic tilt.

### **4. A Moving Joint is a Healthy Joint**

Joint lubrication is achieved by three main mechanisms. First is active movement, this is achieved by moving the muscles and joints. Walking and stretching are low impact activities that can increase the amount of synovial fluid that makes it into the joints. Passive movement is achieved by someone else, like a chiropractor for example. A chiropractor may perform adjustments, assisted stretching, and stabilizing exercises that improve balance and decrease falls. Lastly, nutrition can lubricate the joints from the inside out. Omega 3 fatty acids (fish oil) decreases inflammation and can improve joint lubrication. Another commonly used supplement is a combination of glucosamine and chondroitin to protect the joint and cartilage. These are beneficial for most people but always consult a physician before you begin any supplementation regimen.

### **5. Enough is enough**

A final piece of the spinal care pie is knowing when rest is beneficial and when too much is harmful. There is a delicate balance with rest. You should always rest an injury within the first 12 hours. After this point you need to assess the severity of the damage. If you are able, move around and lightly stretch in a pain free range. Movement lubricates the joints and is especially effective in arthritic conditions. On the flip side, listen to your body. If it hurts, stop. Rest when you need rest. You can chop wood or do laundry another day.

Following these 5 key elements will lead to a healthy and protected spine. If you have any questions, please feel free to call our office at 301.777.0110 or visit our website at [www.alleganychiropractic.com](http://www.alleganychiropractic.com)

Yours in Health,

Dr. Teal L. Tritapoe, D.C.

**Stretches:**

**1. Knee to Chest Stretch**



**2. Seated Hip Stretch**



**3. Neck Stretch**

