Optimal Health University™

Presented by Dr. Smith

Summertime Tips for Back Pain Prevention



Summer is finally here. And however you spend this season, whether tending to household projects or hitting homeruns at neighborhood softball games, Dr. Smith has some winning strategies to keep back pain from spoiling warm weather fun.

Pain-Free Fun in the Sun

After long winter months of reduced activity, most of us can't wait to spend time outdoors. For some, it's a chance to return to the yard and garden. For others, summertime sports are the lure. Yet for many others, back pain puts a damper on summer fun.

In fact, an astounding 60 percent to 85 percent of the population will suffer from low-back pain (LBP) at some point, with approximately 10 percent of those cases becoming chronic (*Harefuah* 2007;146:272-3, 318). There are many risk factors for LBP, from genetic predisposition to environmental influence.

But back pain doesn't have to ruin your summer plans. Whether you're a weekend warrior or a gardening guru, Dr. Smith has scanned the latest research to uncover the following unbeatable tips for thwarting back pain this summer.

Practice Perfect Posture

Optimal posture is perhaps the most important factor for avoiding back injuries. Studies show that correct posture has a direct effect on preventing many types of back pain (*Rev Enferm* 2007;30:9-12,14,16).



Dr. Smith analyzes posture by examining stance and the alignment of the knees, hips, shoulders and pelvis. One condition chiropractors look for is ***vertebral subluxation***, or misalignment of the spinal bones (vertebrae). This irregularity generates back pain because it alters nervous system function and irritates spinal musculature.

Consider making an appointment today for a full chiropractic posture evaluation so you can enjoy summer activities, free from back pain and other types of aches and strains.

Regular Chiropractic Checkups

Learning about good posture is a fine first step, but it's easy to revert to old habits without noticing. Adopting new posture awareness occurs over a period of weeks and months and takes a lot of practice.

Establishing new patterns is essential, but nothing takes the place of regular chiropractic checkups. Chiropractic is uniquely positioned to help patients prevent back pain because care is centered on spinal health. Chiropractic also folds in the best of traditional health care and integrative medicine (*J Altern Complement Med* 2008; Epub).

A chiropractor is trained to identify the underlying physical sources of back pain and nervous system disruption. And care is customized for each patient. Consistent chiropractic visits help patients stay healthy and pain-free all summer, and all year, long.

Ready, Set, Exercise!

Physical exercise is key to preventing all types of back pain (*Harefuah* 2007;146:253-7). This holds true even for people who have previously endured episodes of spinal injury or discomfort, because regular exercise is known to prevent relapses.

Most types of commonly performed exercise are adequate for maintaining back strength and improving conditioning. But a study from Germany tested exercise programs that involve movements *opposite* to the positions the spine is in most often.

The study found that these "countering" exercises are especially effective at preventing pain and overuse injuries (*Spine* 2008;33:E121-31). This same research team proved that inactivity causes back muscles to atrophy, or weaken — so staying active is crucial.

Getting to the Core of the Problem

Especially important for developing a strong back is "core" stability. The core area includes muscle groups, such as the abdominals and the back-supporting paraspinals, that hold the spine erect.

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Core muscles work together to perform double duty, offering both strength and injury prevention (*Curr Sports Med Rep* 2008;7:39-44).

Chiropractors recommend core strengthening to stabilize the spine and prevent injury from summertime activities that stress the spine, such as swatting a baseball or pushing a lawn mower (*Curr Sports Med Rep* 2008;7:39-44).

Summertime Sports Can Be Sweet

Take a look at these special tips for individual sports:

For Golfers Only

Golfers are prone to back injury because of the stress placed on the spine during the club swing. A good swing often pulls on the lumbar area of the back, especially during the follow-through (*J Sci Med Sport* 2008;11:174-81).

Sports-injury experts urge golfers to focus on strengthening the abdominal muscles, along with the multifidi, which are the long muscles on either side of the spine (*Spine J* 2007; Epub). Reinforcement in this area increases flexibility and provides preventive benefits.

In addition, more than half of golfers in one study reported having received chiropractic care, with the vast majority feeling satisfied with their results (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2008;31:313-318). Golfers who develop back pain should consider chiropractic to get them back on the course quickly.

Summertime Tip: Most golfers carry their own bags, usually on only one shoulder. This can trigger back pain (*Spine* 2007;32:E713-7). Using a hand-pull cart, or adding a special strap, available at most pro shops, balances the bag's weight and spreads the load across the entire back, while still allowing golfers to enjoy the cardiovascular benefits of walking the course.

Tennis Anyone?

Researchers report that the simple biomechanics of the game of tennis can set a player up for lumbar neuromuscular imbalance (*Sportverletz Sportschaden* 2007;21:23-8). To prevent damage from over-working the same parts of the back, a tennis-specific exercise routine will relieve stressed areas.

Other research looked at the patterns of muscle activation triggered in a game of tennis, especially during the serve. These studies confirm that strengthening the abdominal and low-back muscles (*J Sci Med Sport* 2003;6:512-8) protects against injury and still allows a powerful serve.

Summertime Tip: The neuromuscular imbalances caused by playing tennis are common in other sports as well. Orthopedic research has proven that people who join back exercise programs can stem injuries and pain in the low back (*Spine J* 2006;6:673-83).

Come On In. The Water's Fine!

A Danish study aimed to determine if low-back pain is connected to certain types of sports: running, gymnastics, handball, soccer, badminton, tennis or swimming. After following 640 schoolchildren to adulthood, scientists concluded that only swimming was associated with reduced low-back pain (*Eur Spine J* 1997;6:181-6).

Another study published in the same journal agrees that swimming can decrease the prevalence of low-back pain (*Eur Spine J* 2008;17:373-9).

Summertime Tip: Swimming prevents back pain because it causes no impact to the spine, while it is still an excellent conditioning exercise.

Ahoy! How to Float Your Boat

While power-boating may not require much physical exercise, other types of watercraft can provide a genuine workout. Paddling sports such as kayaking and canoeing build strong backs in short order and help increase endurance levels.

Rowing a boat is usually just a means to an end. But for more competitive types, rowing and sculling in specially designed shell-type boats work all the back and abdominal muscles efficiently.

Your back also gets a workout if sailing's your passion. Although this workout is not always positive. There are myriad opportunities for back injury when sailing, as the crew scrambles from one awkward position to another in order to keep up with changing wind and water conditions.

British researchers noticed that sailors fare better when they avoid pulling ropes, or "sheets," by hand, and use a windlass instead (*Br J Sports Med* 2008;42:202-6). This special winch is hand-operated and can hoist and adjust, or "trim," heavy sails without causing back strain.

Summertime Tip: Proper use of available boating equipment prevents injury. It's also critical to follow standard sailing and boating protocols.

Enjoy a Back Pain-Free Summer

By all means, get out and enjoy summer, whether it's playing sports and swimming at the beach, or cutting grass and pulling weeds. Taking just a few simple precautions can help keep back pain at bay all summer long. Check with us today for more information.

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