

Health Hints

Understanding And Preventing Low Back Pain

(NAPS)—While there is no quick-fix remedy for low back pain, there is plenty that can be done to predict and even help prevent it. This is good news for the nearly 80 percent of Americans whose quality of life will be affected by this condition.

First, who is most susceptible to low back pain? Studies show that people with weaker back and spinal muscles are 44 percent more likely to experience discomfort.

"If you are looking for motivation and guidance, consider seeing a physical therapist, chiropractor or a certified personal trainer," said Greg Ninberg, doctor of chiropractic. "However, there are plenty of effective exercises you can do in the comfort of your own home."

Here's some tips to consider:

- **Stretch, Stretch, Stretch**—Before getting out of bed each morning, practice some simple stretches that will start the day right. Stretch your back muscles every chance you get, including during work breaks and the lunch hour. Be sure to perform stretches right after work or before bed to relieve the stress of all-day back muscle compression.

- **Don't forget the abs**—When strengthening muscles, focus efforts on the back, but balance the torso by also strengthening the abdominal muscles. Be careful not to strain your back muscles.

- **Consider your work environment**—How your office is organized can have a big effect on your back. Be sure to have a comfortable chair, and organize your work station so the computer can be accessed easily and comfortably.

- **Choose a firm mattress**—If you wake up with back pain but feel fine throughout the day, the mattress may be the culprit. Try sliding a sheet of plywood between the mattress and box springs as a quick fix. Also, ask about the new



Regular strengthening and stretching exercises can help prevent back pain.

cervical pillows that provide more support for the curve of the neck.

"Different equipment can be used to strengthen and stretch low back muscles," said Ninberg. "Some exercises can be done with standard household items, while others may require more sophisticated equipment."

For strengthening and stretching, try Therabands or even a length of rubber tubing. Medicine or swiss balls, and machines like the Ab Dolly, are ideal for strengthening the abdominal muscles; and with strong abs, you're less susceptible to low back pain. For a full body and back-strengthening workout, try the Total Gym, a product trusted by physical therapists.

If you think you may be prone to low back pain, a simple test can help determine how strong your back muscles are. The Static Back Endurance Test, developed by a renowned Norwegian physical therapist in the early 1900s, can be performed in five minutes in the comfort of your home or with the assistance of a doctor.

For more information about the *Static Back Test*, call 800/541-4900 or visit www.totalgym.com.