

EXERCISE AND... BACK CARE

WHAT IS IT?

Back Care is simply one of the most important aspects of preventative activity you can do! Because prevention is always better than cure, looking after the one spine that you have got will ensure that you stay injury-free and mobile. All of our whole body movements, like walking running, bending down, and even getting out of bed originate from the spine and as up to 90% of us know, when back pain strikes, it can leave us incapacitated!

Back pain can affect us in various ways, but it is when there is damage to one of the gel-filled discs in between any two of our 29 vertebrae, that pressure on the nerves of the spinal chord can cause immense discomfort! Usually, the disc damage comes from being distorted (known as “herniated”) where the disc bulges, or torn (known as “prolapsed) where there is damage to the disc surface. This damage can be caused by an acute injury, such as after picking up something heavy in an awkward position, or over a long period of time where poor posture, or strength imbalances lead to more chronic conditions.

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HOW DOES IT AFFECT ME?

Back pain can be very debilitating. Millions of workdays are lost every year in the UK by people staying at home with bad backs. Ironically, it is often what we do at work that causes the pain in the first place! It might be that your seating posture is poor, or that you have to crane your neck to see your computer monitor. Or it may be that you drive a lot - sitting down is not a position that our bodies like very much, and yet it seems to be what most of us do for at least 8 hours everyday! Often, the effects

of sitting, standing, or lying in positions that are putting our spines at risk of injury, are magnified when the muscles that support our spine are not strong enough to cope! These muscles, particularly around the lower back and pelvis, provide vital support when lifting, running, and moving in general. If these deep muscles (sometimes referred to in and around the gym as “The Core”) are not strong or coordinated, other muscles not designed to do the job of the core take over, leading to further imbalances. This is when risk of injury heightens dramatically!

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WHAT EFFECT WILL EXERCISE HAVE ON IT?

The key is to combine gym based exercises under careful instruction from your Personal Trainer or Fitness Team member, with easy lifestyle changes.

Your Personal Trainer can firstly test to see if you have control over your deep abdominal muscles, then show you exercises to strengthen them. But don't be fooled into thinking that these small movements are easy! Your P.T may make them look easy, but they take a lot of dedication and control before you can move on to the strengthening phase. By trying to challenge the muscles before you have control over them would be taking 1 step forward and 2 back, so do it right!

There are **simple lifestyle changes** that you can implement straight away that will have small individual effects, but a huge collective one when it comes to preventing injury to your back. These include:

- Making sure you **sit up straight at work**, and can look straight ahead to your computer monitor at eye level
- **Get up from your desk every hour** if possible and move around!
- **When lifting**, make sure you use your powerful leg muscles by **bending the knees**, and ensure that you are facing straight on to the object you are lifting- a common cause of acute back injuries is lifting a heavy object when trying to bend and twist at the same time

- **Never ignore the pain!** Seek advice from those who know best, like a physiotherapist, osteopath, or a member of the Fitness Team!

Apart from these tips, try to remember the sequence of stabilising, strengthening and stretching the muscles that help you look after your back, and make sure that the one you were given lasts you a lifetime!

Call now to book a free assessment on 9261 3838.