

Aching back! No more!

*There is nothing like back pain to make you feel old and fragile.
Discover some simple truths about back pain, and get on with your life.*

Back pain is extremely common in our society. As a physiotherapist, I see many people with back pain and I myself have had bouts of back pain, often when I am stressed.

When you have back pain you often hear the words degeneration, arthritis, strain, or disc injury, as the possible cause of your problem. What you don't realise is that many people WITHOUT pain can have these same things.

The National Health and Medical Research Council statement on back pain suggests that based on current evidence, it is NOT always possible to diagnose the cause of your back pain.

Why? Because pain is very complex – you feel pain because your brain thinks something is wrong. However, sometimes it over reacts or gets confused. Consider the pain associated with a back spasm. This pain is very intense, often disabling, and some people even end up in hospital due to the level of pain, or not being able to move. However, often it is just a spasm with no underlying problem. There is no damage associated with this problem though we often fear there is, due to the intensity of the pain. If you can stop your panic and relax, then often the spasm will subside.

Possibly 95% of all back pain is NON SPECIFIC, meaning having no specific cause. Only a very small percentage of back pain is nasty, being associated with a fracture, infection, severe inflammation or cancer. Most people find their back pain settles down in a short period of time as healing occurs.

Even if you don't know what the cause of your back pain is, it is IMPORTANT to understand that you can generally get good relief from pain, get on with your life, and stop being afraid of your back, if you follow a few PRINCIPLES.

- Get a proper ASSESSMENT of your problem – see your health practitioner.

- Get proper **EDUCATION** about your problem to help reduce your fear and worry, and better understand what you can do to help.

- **STAY ACTIVE** (within the confines of your pain) and avoid excessive bed rest.

You may need advice on how to move normally, with the least discomfort. It's important that you learn to move freely and without fear, as quickly as possible.

- Use **PAIN RELIEVING THERAPIES**, which work for you. This may include things like pain medication, hot and cold, massage, manipulation, acupuncture, exercise, relaxation, and Bowen Therapy.

- **PREVENT** chronic problems through muscle retraining.

Research has shown that the deep postural muscles can become inhibited when you have a pain or an injury, and that they not automatically reactivate themselves, without specific training. If the deep postural muscles are not working properly, then the superficial muscles take over the role of stability and posture, causing your movement to become stiff, and may lead to ongoing pain or degeneration.

- **Aid HEALING**

Your body will better heal itself if gets adequate rest and relaxation, proper nutrition, adequate blood supply and conditioning, through appropriate exercise.

There are some modalities, which especially may help healing, such as Bowen Therapy, Strength Training and Restorative Yoga. Some people also find Pilates helpful.

For those of you who don't have back pain YET, or would like to **PREVENT** it in the future, there are also a couple of principles you can follow:

- Keep yourself **FIT and HEALTHY**:

30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity on most days of the week.

Keep strong with at least 2 sessions of strength training per week.

Stay flexible with daily yoga or stretching.

Eat well.

Manage your stress, and deal healthily with your emotions.

- Maintain **good POSTURE**

Move naturally and maintain your natural spinal curves. Research has shown that slumping the lumbar curve can lead to strain to the ligaments between the lumbar spine and the pelvis. Yoga is a great way to learn to move naturally, and keep moving that way for life.

- **Stay AWARE**

Avoid straining or doing something beyond your ability.

These guidelines are of a general nature, so if you have specific issues, see your doctor, health practitioner, or call me about an appointment. Make sure whoever you see will work with you using these principles.