

Back to Basics



CHALLENGE
Protect and strengthen your back

Requirements to Complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read "Back to Basics"
2. To complete the challenge, practice healthy habits to protect your back and joints on at least 22 days this month.
3. Keep a record of your completed challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

When Florida resident Jenny Hodges woke up in the morning, her back hurt. At nearly 400 pounds, moving around to do simple tasks was difficult for this mother of three. Her back hurt so much she used a motorized cart to get around, but even sitting was painful. Then one day, after 10 years of living in chronic pain, she fell, badly twisting her knee and ankle and adding to the pain in her back. And that was the turning point for her.

"I hurt everywhere," says Jenny. "I knew that to stop some of the pain, I needed to lose some weight."



She started doing low-impact exercises at a local gym. She pedaled a recumbent bicycle a few minutes at a time. She practiced healthy stretching exercises for her back before and after every workout. And she improved her diet. Overtime, she lost over 200 pounds, significantly improving her health and eliminating the chronic back pain that once ruled her life.

If you're living with chronic back pain, or you've experienced a back-related injury, you know how debilitating it can be. And if your back is strong and healthy and pain-free, keep it that way. Learn how to protect and strengthen your back with this month's Health Challenge: *Back to Basics*.

Take the Healthy Back Quiz

How much do you know about protecting and strengthening your back? Take this quiz to find out:

T F

1. Sitting for long periods of time can stress the muscles, tendons, and ligaments that support your back.
2. You can injure your back doing something as simple as picking up a pencil.
3. If you are overweight, you're four times more likely to develop back pain than healthy weight people..
4. Aerobic exercise, stretching, and strength training can reduce and prevent back pain.
5. Practicing proper posture and lifting techniques can protect your back from injury.
6. Most people with chronic back pain do not need surgery.



Your back, spine, and supporting muscles, tendons, and ligaments are a critical link to the rest of your body. Maintaining a strong and healthy back is important to working, playing, and enjoying a healthy quality of life.

1. True. 2. True. 3. True. 4. True. 5. True. 6. True.

Why does your back hurt?

Most people have experienced some back pain at some point in time. It is one of the most common medical problems in the United States. For many, the pain is caused from straining or spraining the muscles or ligaments in the back. It's often a result of lifting something improperly, overuse, being overweight, or having poor posture. Back pain can even be caused by a sudden, awkward movement, such as sneezing unexpectedly or twisting "wrong." Car accidents or sports-related injuries can also cause back pain. And in some cases, back pain is linked to disk degeneration, illness, infection, and inherited conditions.

An estimated 31 million Americans are living with chronic back pain, according to the American Chiropractic Association. It's the single leading cause of disability worldwide. Half of all working adults experience back pain each year, and it's the second most common reason people visit the doctor, behind the common cold.

Why is back pain such a problem?

- **Increasing rates of obesity.** Obesity puts additional strain on the back and limits physical activity, which is needed for maintaining strong stomach and back muscles.
- **Changes in work life.** Today, most working adults spend the day sitting in front of a computer.
- **Sitting for long periods.** In addition to a sedentary work life, sitting to commute to work, eat meals, and watch TV puts an added strain on your back. Sitting forces the weight of the top half of your body onto a small section of your lower back, stressing the muscles, tendons, and ligaments that support your spine.
- **Decreased fitness levels in the general population.** With an estimated 68 percent of all adults overweight or obese in the United States, most people aren't getting the minimum 150 minutes of exercise a week. And that extra weight and lack of fitness can lead to back pain.
- **Increased rates of depression.** Studies show that people who develop depression are three times more likely to develop chronic back pain than those without depression.

Taking care of your back will keep you healthy and active so you can work, play, and enjoy life.



7 Tips for a Better Sitting Posture
<http://tinyurl.com/plfxuyw>

Quick tips for a healthier back

Surgery is usually a last resort for chronic back pain. In most cases, back pain is not caused by serious conditions like an infection, fracture, or cancer. That means healthy lifestyle choices play a major part in preventing back pain. Here's how to keep your back healthy:

- ✓ **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight increases your risk for back problems. If you are overweight, losing just 10 to 15 pounds can help a lot.
- ✓ **Get regular exercise.** Aim for 30 minutes a day of walking, cycling, or other form of exercise.
- ✓ **Eat healthy foods** to get the protein, calcium, and vitamin D you need for a healthy body and a healthy back. You can do this by eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, legumes and other healthy proteins, and low-fat or nonfat dairy or calcium-fortified soymilk and juice.
- ✓ **Always stretch before exercise** or other strenuous physical activity.
- ✓ **Don't slouch** when standing or sitting. When standing, keep your weight balanced on your feet. Your back supports weight most easily when curvature is reduced.
- ✓ **At home or work, make sure your work surface is at a comfortable height for you.**



Take the Know Your Back Quiz
<http://tinyurl.com/27mfnkd>



Exercises for a healthy back
<http://tinyurl.com/klr4kn9>



- ✓ **Sit in a chair with good lumbar support** and proper position and height for the task. Keep your shoulders back. Switch sitting positions often and periodically walk around the office or gently stretch muscles to relieve tension. A pillow or rolled-up towel placed behind the small of your back can provide some lumbar support.
- ✓ **If you must sit for a long period of time, rest your feet** on a low stool or a stack of books.
- ✓ Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes.
- ✓ Sleep on your side to reduce any curve in your spine. Always sleep on a firm surface.
- ✓ **Ask for help when transferring an ill or injured family member** from a reclining to a sitting position or when moving them from a chair to a bed.
- ✓ **Don't try to lift objects too heavy for you.** Lift with your knees, pull in your stomach muscles, and keep your head down and in line with your straight back. Keep the object close to your body. Do not twist when lifting.
- ✓ **If you smoke, quit.** Smoking reduces blood flow to the lower spine and causes the spinal discs to degenerate.

Sources: *British Society for Rheumatology*; *American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons*; *National Institutes of Health*; *American Chiropractic Association*.



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Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you practice healthy habits to protect your back and joints.
3. Use the calendar to record the actions and choices you made to make taking care of your back and joints become a regular part of your life.
4. At the end of the month, total the number of days you practiced healthy habits to protect your back and joints to complete this challenge. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	HC [] ex. min. _____	
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_____ Number of days this month I practiced healthy habits to protect my back and joints

_____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking or biking

Other wellness projects completed this month:

Signature _____ Date _____

