

Ask *the* Expert

How Can Physical Therapy Help with Back Pain?

“My back hurts!” This is a phrase that you have no doubt heard many times. There is a good chance that you have made this statement yourself on occasion. The truth is, back pain is a common concern which affects an estimated 90% of Americans at some point in their life. Every year billions of dollars are spent treating back pain and even more are lost on missed work time. There can be an infinite number of causes and the symptoms can range from very mild aching that subsides quickly, to severe pain that lasts several years. These symptoms can arise seemingly out of nowhere or as a result of a traumatic injury.

Physical therapy can be effective at treating the symptoms associated with back pain including: loss of range of motion, strength, and the pain itself. More importantly physical therapy can be effective at treating the cause of your

back pain. Physical therapy can also help you to prevent future episodes of back pain by teaching you core strengthening exercises, helping you to maintain flexibility, and teaching you proper body mechanics for daily activities.

Your physical therapist will perform a thorough evaluation and work with you to set goals for your recovery. You will most likely be given exercises to perform at home and receive treatments and perform exercises during each visit at the clinic. These exercises are usually focused toward flexibility, strength and body mechanics.

The treatments can include modalities for pain such as ultrasound, electrical stimulation, heat and/or cold, traction (commonly called spinal decompression), and infrared light. These treatments can help to lower your pain level and allow you to move more freely. Often times the treatments will also include manual therapy. Manual therapy treatments can include: myofascial release, joint mobilizations, muscle

energy techniques, and soft tissue mobilization.

Another component of your treatment will include education. You will not only learn exercises for flexibility and strengthening but also on proper body mechanics and ergonomics. Using proper body mechanics during lifting and every day activities decreases the amount of stress and potential damage to your body. Information on the proper muscle groups to engage as well as on the proper positioning of your joints during activities will be provided.

Ergonomics education is a very important piece of the puzzle. To make it easy, ergonomics simply means to make your environment adapt to you instead of making your body adapt to your environment. One very common place this is put into practice would be at a desk. When the computer monitor, keyboard, mouse, and phone are all placed in the proper places there is less stress on your body.

If these items are not set up properly you are forced to adapt with changes in

posture which can lead to soft tissue breakdown, joint problems, and even disc related problems in the spine.

Here are a few tips to help you relieve your back pain and to prevent future episodes.

- Use a lumbar roll or small towel to give you some lumbar support promoting proper posture.
- Change position frequently so that you are not sitting, standing or bending for too long. The amount of time varies from person to person but a general rule is change position every 30 minutes.
- Use safe lifting techniques such as: keeping your back straight, keep the object close to your body, and testing the weight before lifting.

The next time you find yourself suffering from back pain, contact your physician and ask for a referral to physical therapy. Don't suffer when there is someone that is specially trained to stop the pain and get you back on track.

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