

Back in Shape

How to Live Pain Free with a Healthy Back

By Mimi Solaire, yoga healthy backs instructor

If you have experienced back pain you are not alone. Back problems have become epidemic. 80% of all Americans suffer from back pain at some time in their lives.. Usually the pain is sudden- like a toothache! And like having a toothache, life revolves around seeking pain relief. There is much debate about the best way to relieve back pain. There are also myths regarding the causes of back pain which may influence our choice of treatment options. We may even subject ourselves to unnecessary treatments or give up activities we love.

So let's start by examining some of the facts about back pain.

1. Less than 4% of back pain can be attributed to structural problems.
The spine is amazingly sound, strong and resilient!
2. A herniated disc does not cause pain in the majority of cases.
The majority of herniated disks do not cause pain.
3. The most common age of back pain between the ages of 30-60.
Aging and degeneration aren't the cause since after age 60 the rate of back pain decreases.
4. Most back pain goes away in 6-8 weeks regardless of the type of treatment
Our bodies are experts at healing if we give them time!
5. The back pain epidemic is less than 50 years old
About as long as our sedentary lifestyle.

Now let's look at the real cause of back pain

STRESS

There are two types of stress.

1. Repetitive stress- too much sitting!
Proper body mechanics depend upon good muscle tone to maintain the lumbar and cervical spinal curves. Being overweight will also put too much pressure on the back and jeopardize the spinal curves. Activities such as running, rowing, biking, dancing can trigger an attack if the proper body mechanics are not followed.
2. Mental Stress is evidence of the Mind Body Connection
The mind perceives something as stressful and commands the muscles to contract. Contracted muscles create lactic acid, which creates pain. Nerves affected are peripheral nerves to the muscles. Dr. Jonh Sarno calls this condition Tension Myositis Syndrome. TMS results from "mild blood deprivation (lack of oxygen) to muscles and nerves of the neck, shoulders, back and buttocks. TMS is a harmless condition of soft tissue caused by repressed emotions.". The mind then perceives the body as tight or compromised manifesting emotions of fear, anger

and vulnerability. In order to break the cycle, treatment must focus on both mind and body.

Care and management of our back is our personal responsibility. Self-treatment ultimately brings about better and longer lasting results than any other form of therapy.

So how do we begin?

Like the toothache, back pain has been accumulating unconsciously until a trigger brings the pain to our attention. Like healthy teeth, prevention is the cure. Reducing mental stress begins by acknowledging the sources of stress and making appropriate change. Often the sources are not easily changed but we can balance the stress by taking time to relax. Relaxation is not watching TV or reading a book but practicing meditation or deep breathing. There are many good teachers and tapes available to guide you.

Exercise can help release lactic acid as well as secrete endorphins which are our internal pharmacy of mood elevators. Yoga is ideal for people with back pain since its gentle movements coordinate with breath and body awareness. Yoga is the best Mind Body Therapy! Just taking 15 minutes a day to stretch and tone your body will feel better, more relaxed, and healthy.