

# 11 Top Tips for a Healthy Back

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## **1) Always bend using your knees and hips**

This is really important advice that we all know but don't do! Bend at the knees and hips, keeping your back upright and straight. If you are lifting something heavy bring the weight close to you before you move. Push up using your thigh muscles.

## **2) Maintain good posture**

A lot of my patients' problems are the result of poor posture. Engage your abdominal muscles by gently tucking the pelvis up at the front, sit up or stand up straight, roll shoulders back and down, lengthen the neck and tuck the chin in slightly.

## **3) Get up and move around**

Avoid sitting for long periods, get up and move around every 30 to 40 minutes. Avoid slouching in chairs and hunching your shoulders when sitting at desks. Occasionally use an exercise ball or air cushion to keep yourself moving even if sitting.

## **4) Consider your ergonomics**

This is the set up of your work station. The top of the computer or laptop screen should be at eye height (use a laptop stand and separate keyboard to achieve this), elbows bent to 90 and wrists flat. Hips slightly open beyond 90, knees at 90 and feet flat on the floor. Adjust your desk and chair height to allow for this. Consider a vertical mouse to reduce risk of repetitive strain, a split keyboard to open your shoulders and a standing desk. Use a headset if you need to use the phone a lot.

## **5) Are you sitting comfortably?**

Sit back in your chair at work, so that your lower back is supported and your back muscles can relax. Aim for your shoulder blades to touch the chair, then adjust the position of the chair to bring you closer to the table. Use this feeling of contact with the chair as your guide and reminder! Arm-rests can help as they support the weight of your arms and allow your neck and shoulders to relax.

## **6) Stretch throughout the day**

Try gentle neck side-bending movements, shoulder rolling, reaching behind you and foot pumping exercises to stimulate circulation and alleviate tension.

## **7) Check your bed**

It's time to change your mattress if it's over 10 years old. Go for a 'pocket sprung' type, and 'medium' if it's to go on a slatted base, or 'firm' if it's to go on a sprung base.

## **8) Sleeping position**

If sleep on your back, tuck a pillow under your knees to reduce the extension strain in the low back, and if you're on your side tuck the pillow between your knees to reduce the rotation and side-bending strain.

## **9) Get ready**

Warm up before physical activity and remember to stretch afterwards.

## **10) Take care in the morning**

Your back is more prone to physical injury in the morning. Be careful bending and lifting for the first couple of hours in the morning.

## **11) Exercise**

If your job or lifestyle is sedentary, counteract this to reduce the risk of back-ache with exercise. Try a Yoga for Healthy Lower Back course, gentle Pilates, personal training and swimming, and if your back pain is not settling, seek advice from an Osteopath.