



The current thinking for managing low-back pain is that moving around, rather than lying in bed is the best approach. The importance of early mobilization for persons with low-back pain has recently been proven in a study involving over 300 patients. Those patients who began progressive stretching exercise with the first month of back pain had a 95% success rate. The success dwindled, however, the longer the patients waited to begin exercising. It has also been shown that people in poor physical condition are much more vulnerable to back injuries than those who maintain a higher level of fitness.

A Full Fitness Program

The most important exercise anyone can do to prevent or cure a back disorder is to participate regularly in a physical fitness program. Most back pain is the result of injury - from either sudden (lifting a load too heavy or incorrectly) or cumulative mechanical overload (posture). The soft tissue that is damaged may be a disk, joint capsule, ligament, or a muscle. The damage may result in inflammation, swelling, and biochemical changes - which may be the source of the back pain. Because certain structures in the back have a poor blood supply, especially the disk, early movement can lead to better hydration of these structures through the pumping of water in and out of the disk. Healing is augmented by increasing the fluid exchange in these tissues, because oxygen and nutrients can be delivered to the tissue while extra fluid can be removed more easily.

When back pain has been present for a long time, either continuous or off and on, a vicious cycle of deconditioning starts; decreased fitness and muscle weakness, loss of flexibility and in many cases, changes in attitude and motivation. Exercise will not only help in keeping the person with chronic back pain conditioned, but will also help to improve morale.

The most important exercise program that one can do to prevent or cure a back disorder is to maintain a regular fitness program. There is hardly any type of a physical fitness program that is harmful to the back if the exercise is approached in a sensible manner. Exercise should be started mildly and gradually increased in intensity. Most persons who injure themselves with an

exercise program do so because they start out with "too much too soon" or they do not participate on a regular basis.

If you do suffer from back pain, either new onset or chronic, speak with your Exercise Specialist to make sure that the appropriate modifications can be made to your exercise program if necessary. Your Exercise Specialist may also refer you to a Physical Therapist for specific advice and exercises if the problem is more complex.

Arlana Taylor
Physical Therapist/Exercise Specialist
Healthy Heart Program