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Spine Care Strategies at Work

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Introduction

Work tasks, especially tasks of a repetitive nature, can place significant demands on your spine and the soft tissues that support it. Over time, work tasks - everything from sitting to lifting to bending - can cause body structures and tissues to break down, leading to injury. The goal of spine care strategies at work is to alter your work environment to minimize the effects of repetitive tasks while training your body to stand up to the challenges of your work demands. It is important to use your body, to move your limbs and joints through their full ranges of motion but some work tasks present physical challenges that may overwhelm your body's threshold for injury.

Chiropractors can offer employers a unique perspective on work demands and their effects on their employees. A study published in the journal *Australasian Chiropractic & Osteopathy* states that even one spinal care lecture delivered by a chiropractor in the workplace can reduce spine-related pain among workers and the cost of back injuries.[1] Your chiropractor understands workplace injuries and is the perfect person to share specific spine care strategies with you to address your unique work tasks. We discuss several general work-related spine care strategies in this issue of the Wellness Express.

Strategy #1: Build Physical Activity into Your Routine

Carrying too much weight increases stress on your spine and may contribute to workplace injuries. According to a 2003 study published in the journal *Spine*, obesity is a key independent predictor of back pain and its severity.[2] Another study, published in 2003 in the journal *Obesity Research*, notes that increased levels of Body Mass Index (BMI) correspond with increased levels of

QUESTION:

How much moderate aerobic exercise per week would be a good spinal strategy?
A) 1 – 2 hours
B) 2 – 3 hours
C) 3 – 4 hours

ANSWER:
B) 2 – 3 hours

TRUE OR FALSE:

Carrying excess weight increases stress on the spine and may contribute to injury

ANSWER:
True

QUESTION:

What are some workstation modifications you can use to prevent stress, tension or injury?
A) adjustable chair
B) headset
C) remove clutter
D) all of the above

ANSWER:
D) all of the above

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back, hip, and knee pain in adults over 60.[3] Performing a sufficient amount of moderate aerobic exercise each week (approximately 150 minutes per week) and twice-weekly strength training sessions may help you lose excess weight and bolster your core strength - both of which can help you avoid common workplace spine injuries.

Strategy #2: Pay Attention to Your Posture

Paying attention to your posture may be one of the most effective ways to care for your spine while at work, especially if you sit or stand for long periods. A 2001 study published in the journal *Clinical Biomechanics* reports that spinal stability is affected by posture and that the control of spinal stability is decreased when asymmetric, or unbalanced postures are assumed for prolonged periods.[4] If you stand at work for long periods, consider resting one foot on a stool for a short time to reduce the stress and strain on your spinal tissues. Holding reading material at eye level can reduce stress on your cervical spine and help improve your posture. Simple suggestions for maintaining healthy sitting posture include using a chair that allows you to keep your feet flat on and thighs parallel to the floor and removing any objects (cell phone, wallet) from your back pocket to reduce pressure on your low back. Ask your chiropractor about effective postural exercises you can perform while standing or sitting at work.

Strategy #3: Minimize Workplace Hazards

Falls, lifting injuries, inappropriate footwear and poor workstation design are all possible hazards in the workplace that can be minimized by taking action. To help prevent falls - a common cause of serious back injury among workers - remove objects from your work space that could cause you to trip and ask your employer to make sure slippery surfaces are clearly marked or have carpet or other non-slip surfaces installed. Lift heavy objects with your knees and engage your core muscles for this task. Keep the object close to the center of your body to reduce the stress on your spine and other tissues or ask a co-worker for help in moving heavy objects. Wearing non-slip shoes without any heel elevation is another effective way to minimize workplace hazards.

Strategy #4: Modify Workplace Tasks

Modifying workplace tasks is the key to long-term spine injury prevention. It is important to find ways to perform your work activities that place less strain on your vulnerable tissues and prevent repetitive strain injuries. An ergonomics professional can perform an assessment of your workstation to help you do just this but there are many simple things you can do right now to modify your workplace tasks. Consider using lifting devices or adjustable equipment to manage packages or loads. Using adjustable chairs and desks can help reduce back and neck strain and can ensure that you are in an optimal position in front of your computer screen or monitor. Using a phone headset can significantly reduce neck strain, tension and muscle imbalances that cause problems over time. Ask your chiropractor about other strategies to preserve your spine health while at work.

Quote to Inspire

"No person who is enthusiastic about his work has anything to fear from life "

Samuel Goldwyn

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