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011-467 7022

LIFESTYLE HABITS THAT CAUSE PAIN

By Katya Sampaio

The first in a series of articles discussing causes of everyday pain

Sitting Posture

Lower back pain is one of the most common work-related injuries suffered. Our bodies are designed and like to move. So when sitting in one position for long periods of time you may find that your body begins to tire. Risk factors include a sedentary lifestyle, obesity, poor posture and ergonomics, and weak stabilising muscles known as the “core muscles”.

The usual course in developing work-related lower back pain involves:

- **Fatigue:** Muscles that stabilise the spine in the neutral position will often tire first and as a result the body slouches. When other muscles are recruited as compensation, these may become overloaded and predisposed to injury.
- **Muscle spasm:** This develops from constantly overloaded and tense muscles. The sustained contraction compromises blood flow, decreasing the oxygen and nutrients and increasing waste products in the tissues. Over long periods, shortened or overstretched muscles become weaker.
- **Pain:** The body will try to protect an injured area by tightening around it, resulting in more fatigue and increased muscle spasm.

How your workspace is arranged may affect your posture. By following these ergonomic tips, one can prevent and ease these problems:

- **Correct your sitting posture.** Your chair should provide adequate lumbar support to maintain its natural curve. The height of your chair should be corrected so that your elbows are at keyboard height and your forearms parallel to the floor. Get a footrest so that your hips are slightly higher than your knees and you are sitting comfortably in the chair with your back and thighs fully supported.
- **Pay attention to your workstation ergonomic setup.** That means that your computer should be located in the middle of the desk so that you do not have to twist or angle your head towards the computer. Watch for rounded shoulders and slumping your

head forward caused by reaching over in order to see documents on the desk. The top line of your work on the computer monitor should be at eye level.

- Place your desktop equipment in optimal positions. You should not have any obstructions to your feet under your desk.
- Take regular and adequate work breaks. This means that every two hours you should sit back and do some neck and back stretches. People may find it helpful to place a sticker on their computer screen as a subtle but powerful reminder to correct your posture while working. Every time you glimpse at the sticker, it may remind you to correct something in your posture or on your desk.

References

1. Causes of Back Pain - Your Body at Work by Pippa Bowden
2. Common injuries sustained at work by Angela Hendricks
3. Optimal workstation setup by Angela Hendricks