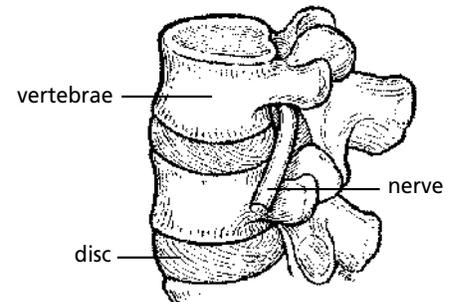


dealing with discs

Your back consists of stacked bones called vertebrae. There are discs between the vertebrae that act as shock absorbers and that allow the spine to bend. Each disc consists of a soft semi-fluid centre (the nucleus) that is surrounded and held together strong by ligaments.

The discs in your spine can be the source of a great deal of back pain. This pain can range from a nagging ache and sciatic discomfort to excruciating pain that incapacitates you. There are simple measures you can take to reduce the risk of disc problems occurring and to reduce your pain once problems do occur.

To understand how disc pain happens, it is important to understand normal posture. When standing upright there is a natural inward curve in the lower back called a lumbar lordosis. With this natural lordosis, your body weight is distributed evenly over the discs. The lordosis is



The disc, which sits between two vertebrae, acts like a shock absorber for the spine. Nerves come out of the spinal cord and pass through small holes behind the disc.

lost whenever you slouch or bend forward. Back problems develop if you find yourself in these positions for long periods of time. This occurs because the vertebrae are placed in a position that pushes the nucleus backwards and stresses the ligaments at the back of the disc.

If the pressure on the ligaments is severe enough they may become weak and allow the soft inside part of the disc to bulge outward (prolapse) and press on the spinal nerves. This can cause sciatic pain in the buttock or down the leg.

 - The disc can bulge and press on spinal nerves. 

prevention is best

Ideally, you want to stop back pain from developing by taking some simple steps to reduce strain to your back.

Many chairs don't offer sufficient support for your low back. Even well designed chairs can be used improperly. For example, most people sit on the middle of the seat and then slouch backward against the back support. It is important to maintain the natural lordosis in your low back while sitting. You can use a specially designed lumbar support that can be attached to your chair or simply roll up a

medium sized towel and place it between your low back and the backrest of your seat. As well, stand up regularly, put your hands on the back of your hips and bend backwards five or six times.

Many activities around the home like gardening, making the bed and vacuuming cause you to stoop forward. Make sure that you stand upright occasionally and bend backwards to relieve the strain on the back ligaments. If you are doing any lifting, make sure to keep your back straight and bend from your hips and knees.

backexercises

Here are several extension exercises you can do to recover from low back pain, specifically acute episodes of back pain - when your back "goes out." They put the vertebrae in a position that pushes the soft centre of the disc forward so it stops pushing on the ligaments or nerves in the low back.

Before beginning, consult with your massage therapist to be sure that they are appropriate for

you. Do them in the order outlined. When doing these exercises you should move until you just start to feel discomfort and then return to the starting position. If you do these exercises every two hours, about six to eight times per day, you should notice a significant change in pain within one to two days.

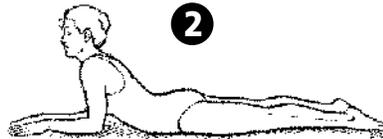
Closely observe the location and intensity of your pain. If your pain becomes less diffuse and localizes to your back or if the pain becomes less intense, you'll know these exercises are working.

If the pain intensifies or starts to spread further from your spine, especially below the knee, stop exercising and get advice from your massage therapist.

backexercises



Lie face down with your head turned to the side. If your neck is uncomfortable in this position, roll up a towel and place it under your shoulders. Take deep breaths and consciously try to relax the muscles in your low back. Stay in this position for about five minutes.



Remain face down. Place your elbows directly under your shoulders so that you are leaning on your forearms. Take deep breaths and allow your back to relax completely. Hold this position for about five minutes. This exercise should be done after Exercise 1 and should be done only once per session.



Place your hands under your shoulders. Straighten your arms and push your body upwards. Let your pelvis sag and rest on the floor. Relax the muscles around your low back and hips completely. It is important that you hold this extended position for one to two seconds before you lower yourself to the starting position. If you feel that the pain is decreasing or localizing, you may hold the position for a little longer. Repeat this exercise ten times after having completed Exercise 1 and 2.



Extension

exercises are

designed to

abolish your

pain and

restore your

normal

movement



Q&A

what is sciatica?

The sciatic nerve is a large nerve that begins at the base of the spine and that passes through the buttocks and continues down the back of the thigh and into the lower leg. This nerve can become compressed or inflamed. If this occurs, pain begins to travel down the back of your leg.

This pain is referred to as "sciatica". Sciatica can be caused by a bulging disc,

arthritis of the spine, a tight piriformis muscle in your buttocks and even trigger points in your muscles. Depending on the cause and the severity, you could also experience numbness, tingling or weakness in the leg. If you experience any of these symptoms, see your massage therapist as soon as possible for assessment and treatment.

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