



NATURAL

Solutions
to **Back Pain**

Back pain is a more widespread condition than many of us would assume. When we mention it, the picture that usually comes to mind is that of an older person hunched over a Zimmer frame. But the reality is very different to that. In fact, most back pain cases, and the worst back pain, happens in people aged 35-55. These are people who are not young enough to bounce back from minor strains and injuries, but who are still in full time employment.

This age range is at great risk of developing back pain because they are at the peak of their career, and full-time employment leads to all sorts of back troubles. When we are younger our joints are more flexible, and this includes our spine. This means we can hunch over a desk for 4 hours, stretch, and feel good again. But after 35 most of us do not have this flexibility anymore, so our working lifestyle of always leaning over our desks will hurt our backs. When we are younger we are also more robust against poor diet, poor sleep, and stress, all of which can lead to inflexibility in the back and slower recover in people over the age of 35.

As we get older not only do we leave our unhealthy work environment behind, but we tend to become more health conscious. People over 55 are more likely to eat a balanced diet, exercise, sleep properly, and engage in de-stressing techniques than people aged 35-55. This means that even though over the age of 55 we are even less flexible and able to bounce back than people in their 30s and 40s, we are giving our bodies the tools they need to heal and recover. And the back pain which is suffered by people over 55? Either they remain careless about their health, or they are suffering from conditions such as osteoporosis caused by their poor habits aged 35-55.

Another back-pain myth is that it is a rare thing. In reality, 80% of people will suffer back pain at some point in their lives, and 50% of us will suffer it every year. Back pain is ridiculously commonplace because it is caused by many things. Anything from structural damage to an autoimmune condition to generic inflammation can bring it on. Lower back pain is by far the most common form, but upper back pain, neck pain, and combined back pains are not exactly rare either.

Part of the reason back pain is so rarely addressed is, in fact, because it is so common. Much like a cold, or a headache, we suffer back pain so much and so often, and we see others suffering it so much, we write it off as “one of those things that happens” and try and get on with our lives despite it. However, unlike a cold, back pain is very rarely inevitable! Most cases of back pain are completely preventable, and treatable when they begin. All we need to do is identify where they are coming from.

Secret signs of back pain

You would think that if you have back pain you would know. Pain in the back, right? But actually, because most of us live in a way that encourages back pain, the pain is only one of the symptoms. You can have signs of back pain before the pain begins, or you can get used to the discomfort of back pain but still be aware of the secondary symptoms around the sides. When we begin to understand that back pain is a symptom of a bigger problem, then we can learn to look out for other symptoms, and become more aware of what is causing our pain, when it is likely to start, and how to prevent and treat it.

Headaches are a big symptom of back pain. The tension in our spines and necks can carry over to our scalp and jaw, causing the tightness around the head which results in intense headaches. Likewise, stress hormones which make your back tense and interfere

with the blood flow around your head, causing stress headaches. And too much tension in the front of the neck can slow blood flow and breathing, making the body go into panic. If you suffer from frequent and intense headaches, then you may also be suffering from back pain. A headache can also be a sign that back pain is about to begin.

Inflexibility and back pain go hand in hand. A lot of back pain is related to poor posture and lack of exercise. With joints, much like with muscles, if you don't use it, you lose it. As you become less active and move less, your muscles and joints will degrade, leaving you unable to do simple things like twist at the waist or touch your toes. This level of inflexibility is very normal in modern western people, but normal does not mean natural! We are supposed to have highly flexible bodies, especially in the back and waist. If you are finding it difficult to move your torso, then you have a lot of muscular tension, or very stiff joints, which may be caused by, or causing, your back pain.

Constipation and incontinence can be caused by the same things that cause back pain. Our bodies are designed to move a certain way and when we do not, it isn't only one or two things which fail. Our bowels are ran by a series of muscles which tense to push food waste through to our colon. When we are in the wrong position, these muscles can tense too much or too little, literally halting the movement of waste. What is more, our abdominal cavity is designed to be open and stretched out most of the time. When we are hunched over we put pressure on our guts and bladders, which can cause incontinence and discomfort. By maintaining a healthy, flexible back and good posture in general we would avoid suffering constipation or incontinence.

These are only the most common examples of how back pain and the rest of our bodies are related. We can also observe how back issues are connected to insomnia, acid reflux, and muscle weakness. In short, even if you think your back pain has gone, if you are suffering any of these other ailments it is likely that the cause of your back pain is still there. Which means the back pain could return at any minute. And even if you have never had back pain, if you are experiencing any of the above symptoms you are at risk of developing it. So how do we prevent back pain in the first place?

Preventing back pain

It is often said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This is the medical version of "a stitch in time saves nine", and it basically amounts to being aware that fixing something is usually much more complicated, difficult, and expensive than preventing it in the first place. Sure, there are some people who will overeat repeatedly and then get liposuction, or who will drink to excess and then take medication to counter the hangover. But most of us try and treat our bodies fairly, and to prevent the ailment rather than heal it.

Back pain, as we have already mentioned, is almost always preventable. Do you really think if half of us had back pain every year, we would have survived as a species? Can you picture Grog the caveman stopping chasing an antelope to pop his spine, swallowing some painkillers for an ache, or walking around hunched over cause his back seized up? How many animals have you seen walking about crippled with back pain?

Of course, back pain does happen of its own accord from time to time. You could suffer an injury, or develop autoimmune conditions such as arthritis which cause back pain. But most cases of back pain? Most of them are caused by things which we are doing. Which means that most cases can be prevented just by identifying the things we do which can cause back pain and stopping them.

It is important to remember that none of us are invulnerable to back pain. Just because you have not experienced back pain, nobody in your family has experienced it, and you have not seen any of the warning signs does not mean you aren't at risk of developing it. We will now see how some of our daily habits can contribute to back pain. And if you do any of these things, even if you have never suffered back pain, you are putting yourself at risk of developing it.



Posture and back pain

Posture is probably the biggest key to back pain. As was mentioned earlier, our bodies were designed to move and rest in very specific ways, for the right amount of time each day. To put it into perspective, let's think of dogs. A dog can easily jump up on its hind legs and balance there. But does this mean the dog is meant to be in that position? Over time, what do you think will happen to this dog's body if it stays in that position most of the day? A dog's organs aren't designed to sit at an angle like that. A dog cannot sniff the ground when it walks like that. A dog cannot comfortably go to the toilet, run, jump, mate, or eat like that. Its body will adapt to being on its hind legs and it could be very good at it, sure. But it will still be putting unnecessary stress on its organs, muscles, and joints.

Many of us have poor posture today and it's because we are doing a similar thing to what that dog is doing. We are standing hunched over, sitting for too much of the day, sitting on chairs at a ninety-degree angle, sitting to go to the toilet and eat, wearing poorly designed clothes, carrying bags over one shoulder... We evolved to spend most of our day standing and squatting with our feet flat on the ground or lying down. And yet we spend very little time in these positions at all! So, our bodies have adapted to being sat down on a chair all day, which ruins our natural posture when the time comes to stand, walk, run, lift, etc.

Proper posture may seem a little odd to us visually. This is because we have also been told for generations that we must stand and sit with our backs rigidly straight and erect, which is also incorrect. Actual healthy posture is relaxed, with feet flat on the ground and slightly apart, back straight but not tense, buttocks and stomach held in but not tense either, shoulders relaxed, and neck aligned with our waist and hips. This position may look a little soft or even slouchy to those of us used to being told to straighten up, but as long as our necks, waists, and hips align, then having our limbs a bit more relaxed is more natural.

Trying to adopt proper posture can be a challenge. A lot of a modern life involves sitting behind a desk or in a car, and unless you have a workplace which permits standing desks or is within walking distance of your house, you will probably not be able to change that. But there are little things you can do to improve your posture, such as stretching and checking your posture every half hour, and getting up to walk at least every two hours. This will keep you from developing the worst back pain related to sitting in a bad position too long.

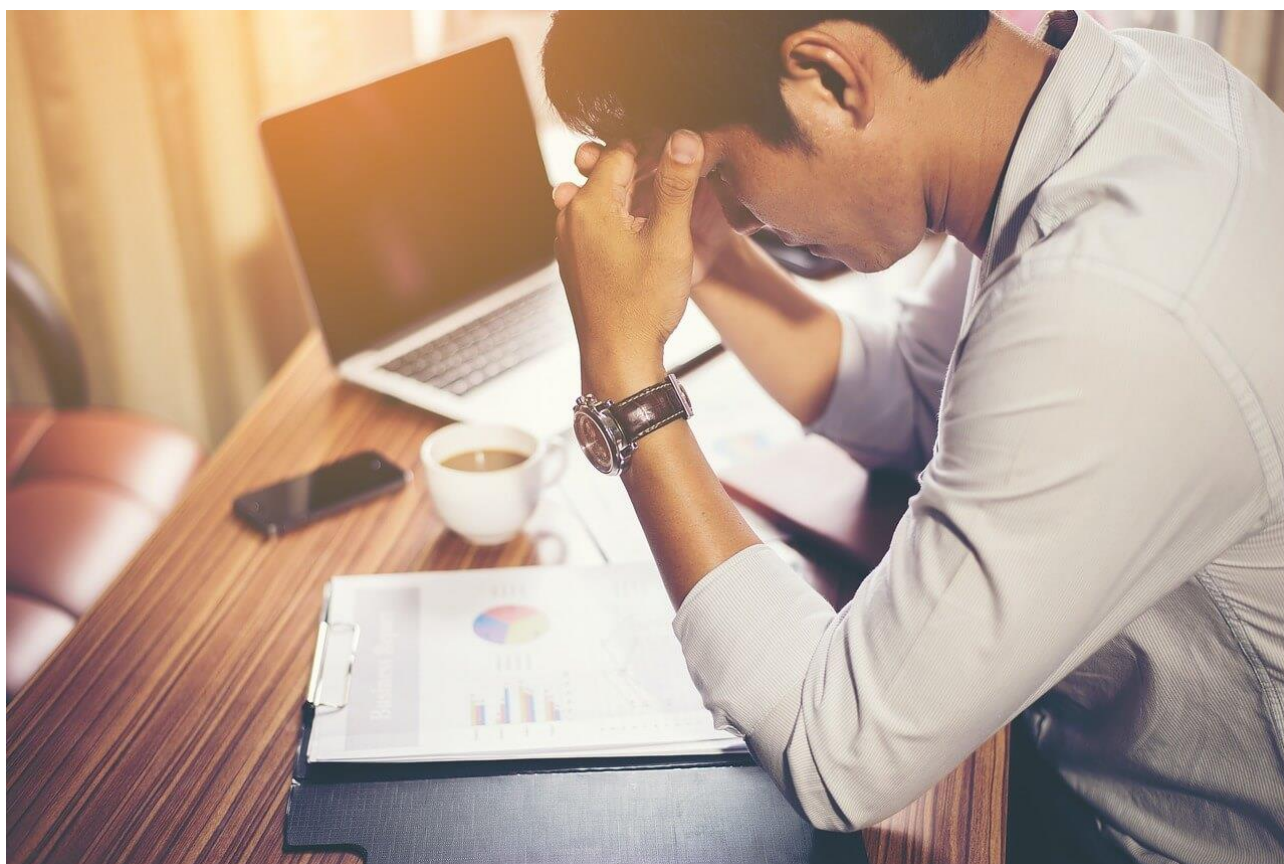


Unhealthy clothing choices can also interfere with our posture. High heels, for example, put a lot of pressure on the lower back. But many of us already know that high heels are an unhealthy choice for our backs. Did you know, however, that so is uncomfortable underwear, an ill-fitting bra, loose trousers, a tight jacket, or a pencil skirt? The clothes we wear every day should fit us like our own skin: tight enough not to shake and get caught on things, loose enough that we have a full range of motion. If clothes are too tight then we cannot move naturally. If clothes are too loose then we move awkwardly to compensate. And if clothes are in any way uncomfortable then we will adopt a more shrunken, less healthy posture.

There are clothes and supports which improve your posture for you, but you will need to be wary of them. This is because, as we shall explore below, too much support is actually a bad thing for our posture. Simply stick to not wearing clothes you think are bad for you, and choosing comfortably fitting clothes whenever possible, and you will get better results than any posture correcting corset could offer.

The best way of improving posture is through sheer force of habit. The more you do something, the more it becomes second nature. By correcting your posture whenever you realize it is failing and by routinely forcing yourself to adopt good posture, eventually you will find yourself walking and sitting in good posture naturally, which will prevent you from forming unnatural arches in your spine which would cause back pain.

Stress and back pain



Another factor to preventing back pain is reducing stress. We often experience stress throughout all our bodies and it has two distinct effects on our backs.

Firstly, stress affects our posture. We have already seen how poor posture can cause back pain, so let's make sense of how stress causes poor posture. It has been found that psychological and physical wellbeing are actually closely connected. When a person feels good about themselves, happy, and relaxed, they adopt a posture which reflects their mood. But did you know that when someone forces themselves to stand in a relaxed and confident way they begin to feel relaxed and confident too? Time and time again we have found that posture and self-perception are so closely connected that they create a feedback loop, where feeling a certain way makes us walk a certain way, which reinforces our feeling.

When we are stressed we tend to adopt a tense, fearful, or angry posture which causes us pain. But by adopting this posture we are also making ourselves more stressed, and therefore more likely to keep this posture permanently! But we don't need to give in to the cycle now we know it is there. Instead, we can use this to our advantage by making ourselves adopt a more confident, relaxed, happy posture. This posture will make us feel better, will look after our backs, and will encourage us to adopt a better posture more often.

Not only does stress cause poor posture, but secondly stress makes our muscles tense up. This is because on a basic biological level stress is a tool. It is all the hormones that are released when we fear for our lives, especially cortisol and adrenaline. These hormones are designed to make us fight or flee from a threat, they are active hormones. And because they are so active, they will speed up our heart rate and breathing and tense our muscles, ready for action. And if this action never comes, then we end up with painfully stiff and sore muscles, which in turn limit the mobility of our joints, making us stiffer and more sore by the second.

Exercising after a stressful day or a stressful event is a great way of fighting stress. Your body was made to exercise during times of stress, so by doing a bit of stretching, going for a run, going through a bodyweight workout, or hitting the weights, you are fulfilling that basic biological need. Even just five or ten minutes of exercise can burn off the remaining stress hormones, regulate your blood pressure and heart rate, and release your tense muscles, massively reducing your risk of back pain. The only key to remember is that you must exercise every muscle in your body to ensure that all of them are relaxed. Many people find that yoga does the trick. By relaxing your muscles after a stressful day, you prevent the muscle tension from building up and causing back pain.

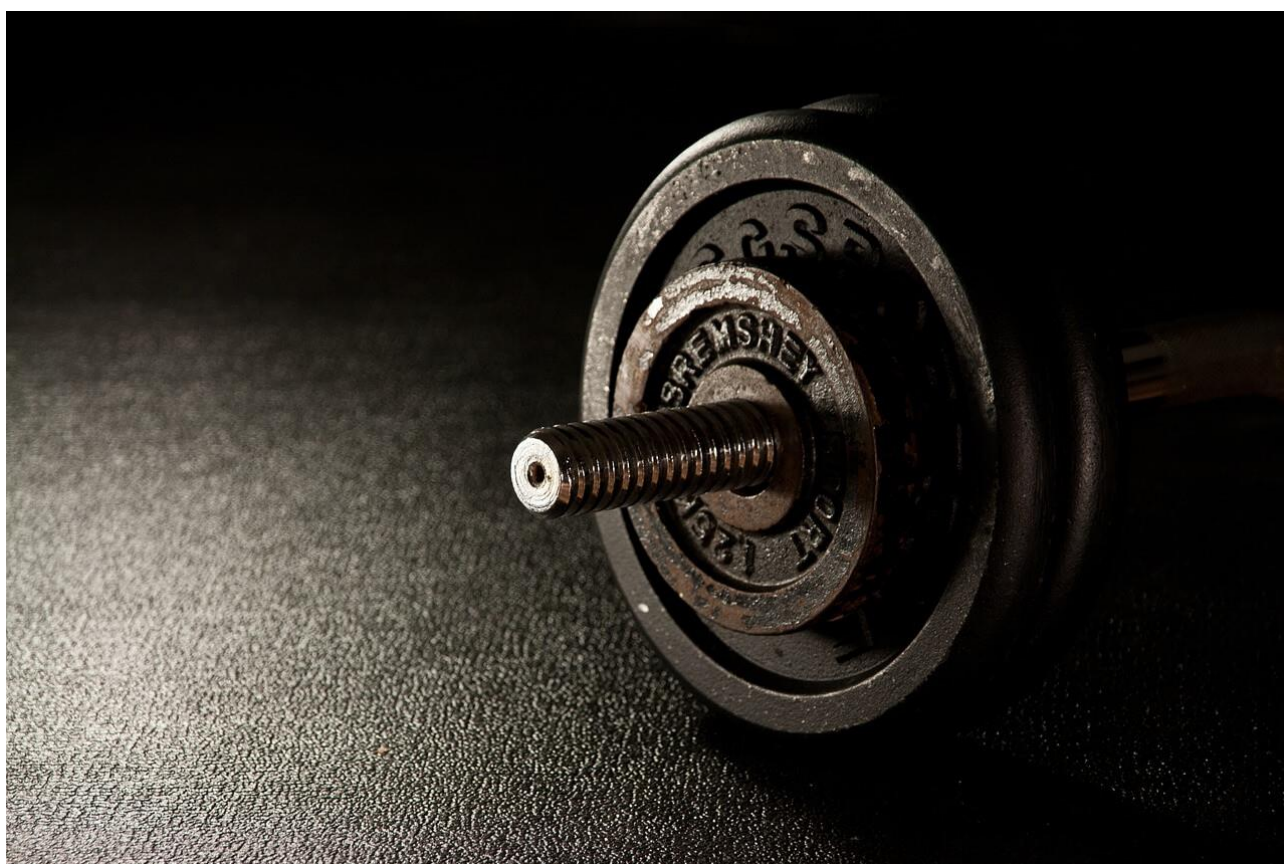


But what about when you're actively experiencing stress? You can't exactly start sprinting

or lifting in the middle of a bad day at work, or an argument with a friend, or a meeting with your bank manager. However, there are ways of reducing the stress as it forms. Adopting mindfulness practices when we are stressed is a great way of preventing back pains related to stress. Mindfulness means focusing on the moment and your circumstances and trying to eliminate thoughts which may be making you more stressed and welcoming thoughts that help you. Some people find that meditating to “let go” helps them, whereas others benefit more from really picking apart the stressful situation.

You need to work out your own way of managing stress, but if you want to avoid stress-related back pains then you need to manage it, whatever else you do. If you do not handle your stress you may find that the tension and poor posture causes back pains which you cannot address, and which affect your back health in the long run.

Strength and back pain



An often overlooked component to back pain is sheer muscular strength. Our muscles do more than just pick things up or walk us from place to place. Our muscles are part of the system which holds our entire body together and gives it shape. If you were to cut the muscles down one side of your spine, eventually the other side would pull your spine into a curve. If you always carry things in one hand eventually your back muscles on that side will grow stronger. Everything to do without muscles helps protect our backs from pain. A strong, healthy back pulls evenly in both directions, and can handle one-sided exercise like carrying a bag in one hand without twisting the spine. This is achieved by having healthy muscles.

In many ways our muscles are weak and deficient from a modern lifestyle. A huge part of this is quite simply that we are not using these muscles. When we don't use our muscles,

they will degrade quite quickly, so even a couple of weeks doing nothing but sleeping, sitting in a car, sitting in a chair at work, and sitting in a chair at home will make us lose a lot of muscle mass and strength. Now imagine how much we lose from just sitting around all day every day, year after year. No wonder back pains start getting bad in your mid to late thirties, after most of us have quit regular exercise for a decade or longer!

If you want to correct muscle weakness, then lifting weights is a great way of developing overall muscles and encouraging good posture. Lifting weights works because it forces your muscles to tense. As you lift gradually heavier weights, your muscles tear and break down slowly, eventually being repaired stronger, then breaking again, then being repaired stronger yet again. This means you increase the amount of muscle tissue you have, as well as the effectiveness of the muscle you already had.

Lifting weights will also teach you how to move your body healthily. Because to lift weights safely you need to do so within your body's natural limits, you end up teaching yourself how to move properly. A bit like when we learn to walk we eventually reach a point where it becomes automatic, eventually these lessons from lifting weights become ingrained. This is very important because a lot of back pain caused by injuries is actually caused by lifting or moving incorrectly. Think of those instructional comics showing you the right and the wrong way to pick up a heavy box. If we all did an exercise called the deadlift regularly, then we would have known how to pick up that heavy box instinctively!

What is more, if you are strong then your back is protected even in sudden physical situations. When you find yourself in a sudden physical situation, your whole body will tense or relax to protect you. For example, when you see something charging towards you your body will tense up and make you leap aside. Or when you burn your hand, you will pull it away. When it comes to sudden, jerking movements involving the back, an untrained person may find that they injure their backs. This is because the muscle on their body is simply not strong enough to tense up and protect the back! If they had more muscle, they would not have injured their back.

If you find that lifting weights is too much too soon, you may benefit from beginning with lighter exercise, such as bodyweight workouts. There is nothing at all wrong with doing bodyweight exercises at first. You may not feel as impressive, but when you go from doing no pushups to doing five, then you have made progress and given your body the tools it needs to protect your back from injury and pain.

Back supports and back pain

Things which support your back have been recommended for a long time by conventional doctors, but we are only just starting to see how much harm they can do. The reality is that our bodies are more than equipped to support themselves! By adding extra layers of support what we are really doing is stopping our bodies from supporting themselves and getting them to burn up all the muscle and ligaments which we “don't need”. Think of what happens to the unused legs of a paraplegic person, or a bodybuilder when they give up training. That is what happens when you “support” your body with artificial structures. But they're still everywhere.

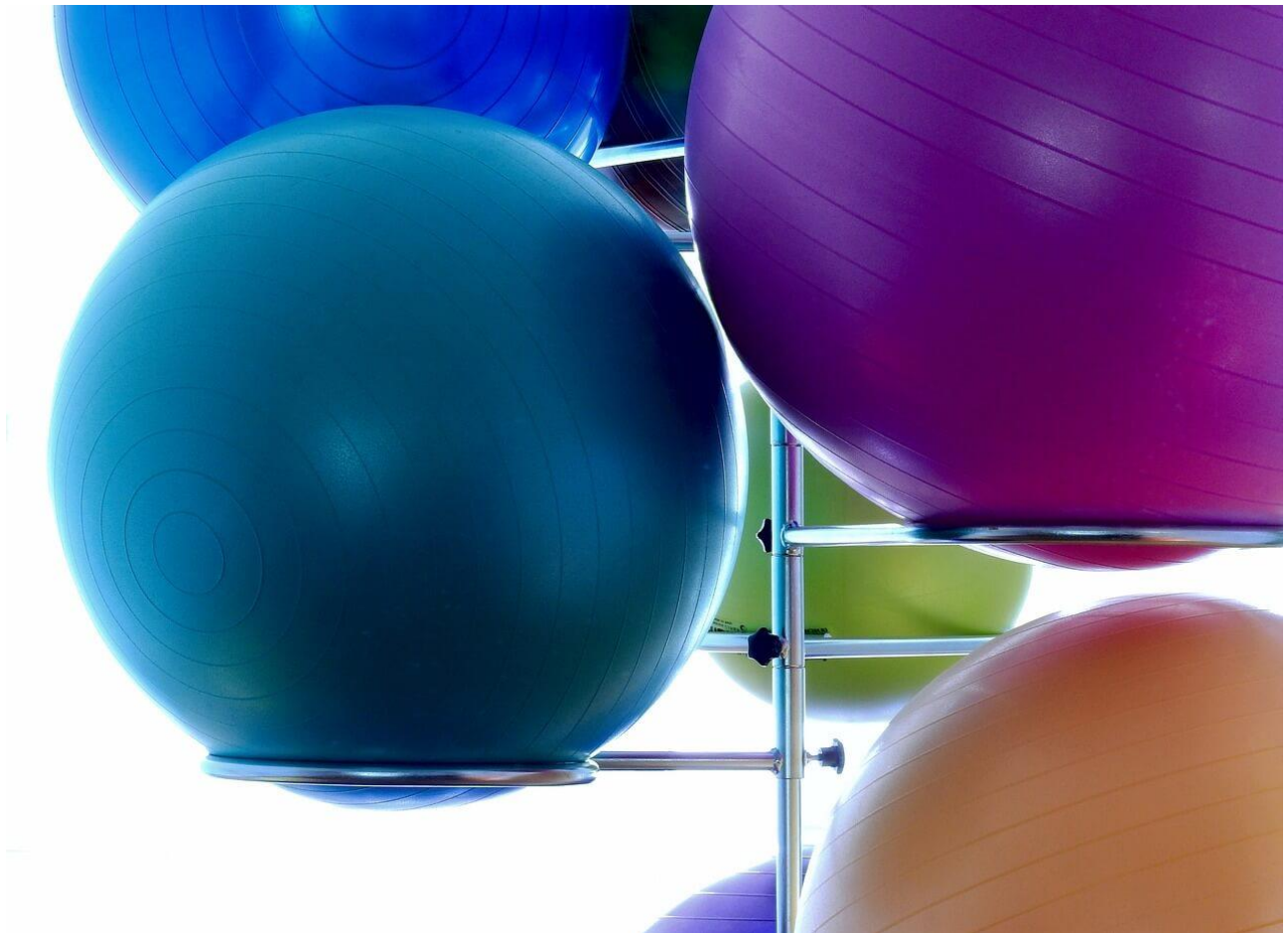
On a medical level we have posture correcting clothes and tools to take pressure off your back. The theory behind these is neat: by taking the pressure off your back you give it a chance to heal back stronger and to make any repairs it needs to do. But the reality is that

even though a corset or a brace that supports your back is great in the short term, especially if you have an injury, it is not so good in the long term. In the long term you want to strengthen your muscles and rebuild your back naturally, so that it supports itself.

There are also special shoes designed to in theory help you build muscle, balance, and posture. These work the other way, usually: by destabilizing our bodies. There are shoes which rock, tilted shoes, barefoot shoes, pressure point shoes... all sorts of shoes, largely designed to make us as unstable when we walk as possible. And again, the idea is pretty sound: a little instability will encourage us to use our back muscles to stabilize ourselves. But don't forget that there are times when having steady footing is important, and these shoes prevent that. It is a much wiser idea to simply do exercise.

Avoiding clothes is easy. But even everyday supports can degrade our backs! An ergonomic office chair may be a great idea for a few hours, but over several days it will do the same thing as our posture correcting corsets. We may feel great sinking back into it, but all those curves perfectly fitting our spines are discouraging our muscles from holding us upright on their own. Remember: there are no chairs in nature. What we need isn't a more ergonomic chair, it is no chair!

Again, many people seek to counter this by destabilizing their bodies. They will swap their ergonomic chair for an exercise ball, a wobble board, a standing desk, or something else which encourages them to move their backs just to stay upright. But this again puts you at risk of injury and prevents you from properly focusing on your work. It may seem like a great way of counteracting a sedentary life, but really it is mostly just a gimmick.



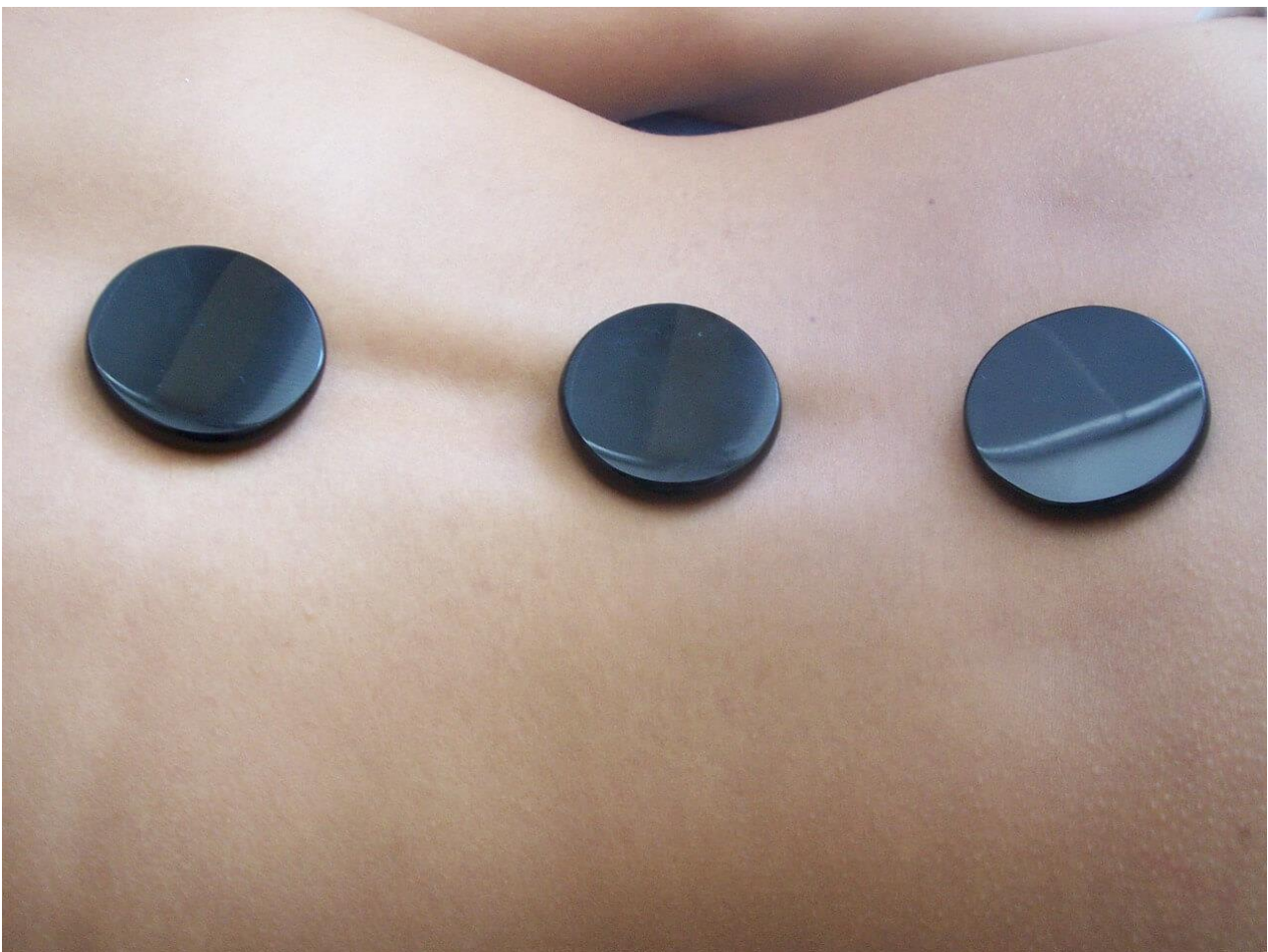
The real solution is far simpler: just choose a backless chair. A backless chair provides

you with somewhere to comfortably rest your rump, but without that extra back support which allows your back muscles to degrade day in, day out. A backless chair is also a cheap and versatile alternative which is realistic and not embarrassing to use in your office or home. Benches, stools, or any other sort of backless seat are very simple, cheap, and normal.

Whilst we're talking about furniture, a supportive mattress is also not ideal. Whether it's a form-adapting memory foam mattress or a pocket sprung one, most mattresses that advertise adapting to the natural curves of your body are again doing you a disservice. By fully supporting every curve of the spine they are encouraging your back muscles to weaken. Instead, when we choose a mattress which does not fully support us, we encourage our back muscles to support us instead, which can help our backs get stronger against injury and pain.

Once again, it is not necessary to go back to sleeping on the floor, or in a bed of pillows and fluffy bunnies. There are many semi-hard, semi-firm mattresses which will offer you all the support you need without pushing at your joints and bones. Look for one which when you lie down on it you feel comfortable, but not like it is hugging you. A bit squishy underneath, but you aren't sinking. That is the perfect texture for keeping comfortable and maintaining a strong back.

Treating back pain



No matter how hard you fight it, it is entirely possible that you will still suffer back pain.

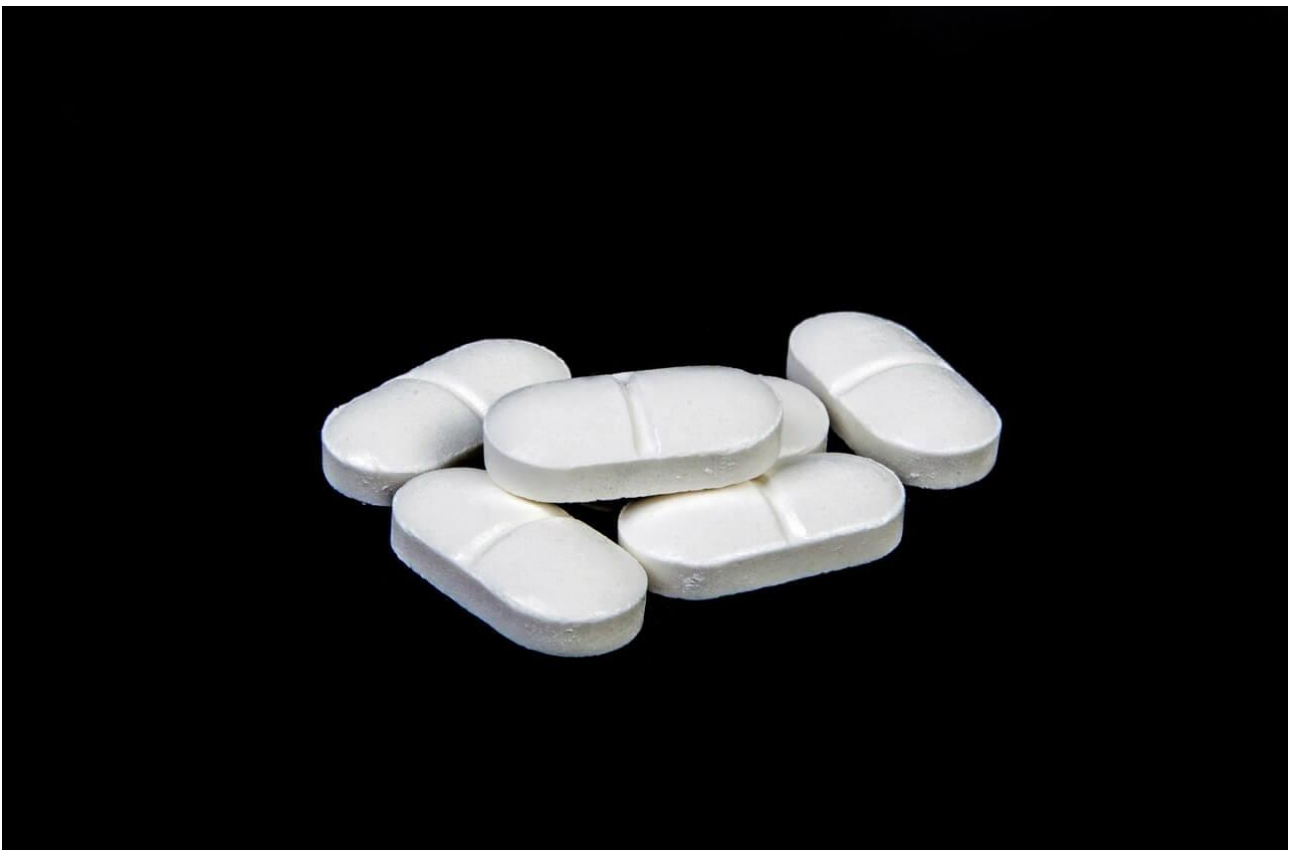
Maybe you had an accident or an injury that has damaged your back. Maybe, for whatever reason, you were not able to stick to the prevention methods. Perhaps because you already had an injury, illness, or disability, or perhaps because your work routine did not let you exercise or practice stress relief. Maybe you did not know about them, or did not take prevention seriously, and now it is too late.

But it isn't too late. Like I said before, back pain is actually a symptom, not a condition itself. So not only can you fight the back pain, but if your back pain resists treatment you can fight its causes. Many people give up on treating back pain when conventional pain relief fails them, but there is so much more that we can do to treat back pain. We just need to start viewing it holistically, instead of just as a problem which strikes us at random.

I would recommend beginning with pain relief of some description, whether it is medicinal, mindfulness, or anything in between, then seeking an accurate diagnosis about the cause of your back pain. When you know what is actually causing your back pain it is much easier to see everything coming together as a whole, and to understand how to treat your personal pain.

I would also advise to really think about the exact circumstances surrounding your pain. Not just what type of pain it is and what caused it, but also who you are, what your life is like, and how you can alleviate your pain on a daily basis. Something that works well for someone in their mid-thirties may not work for someone over sixty. Something that you can do every day may not be a realistic possibility for your friend. Make sure to be considerate towards your body and its needs before making a commitment to any particular sort of treatment.

Over the counter medication for back pain



Pain relief is always worth considering, even if the most important thing is getting to the root of your pain. Knowing where back pain is coming from will definitely help you to fight it and reverse it in the long run, and I would advise that you not take painkillers until you've worked out the source. But once you know where the pain is coming from, healing is usually a long term process, and there is no reason why you shouldn't take the edge off your pain while it lasts. We have a wide array of options for pain relief.

Although many over the counter treatments for back pain are conventional painkillers, not all of them are. We do have the standard NSAIDs and paracetamol, which can be really great for people who tolerate them well, and who are suffering minor pains. However, they have their own downsides. NSAID stands for non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, which means it reduces inflammation, but it also does this by thinning the blood. What is more, you can only take so much of an NSAID, so if it doesn't work for your pain, then you can't have any more.

A topical ibuprofen gel sometimes helps. However, it does not deliver the slow release of pain relief that oral painkillers deliver, and they will not penetrate as deeply. What is more, it can be hard to measure a safe dose of topical ibuprofen. If it works, that means it is getting into your body, so, much like oral ibuprofen, you don't want to have too much. But how much is too much would be hard to determine, unlike with a measured pill where you know what you are getting.

Paracetamol is not an NSAID, but it has its own distinct issues. It does not interact with other medication, which is fabulous. But it erodes the lining of your stomach and can cause serious liver damage, which is pretty terrible. For those reasons you cannot take paracetamol for an extended period of time, and an overdose can be painful and even lethal. Again, this over the counter medication is fine once or twice, but for chronic pain or prolonged pain it is a terrible idea.

At the higher end, we are often prescribed opioids for pain. These are again wonderful for people in serious, chronic, untreatable pain. They will either relieve you enough that you stop caring about the pain or take it all away. But for everyday, treatable pain like back pain, they are a bad idea. Opioids are highly addictive substances, so they are not good as a short term pain solution. Once again, a single dose of an opioid, for example if you suffer a broken bone, can help. But it is unwise to take an addictive substance every day.

Turmeric is a natural form of pain relief. It works by reducing inflammation in the body, so it will not be great for bone based pains or nerve pains, but it would help a lot with stress-based and muscular back pain. The major downside to turmeric is that it cannot be taken alongside blood thinners and many heart medications, and it is not advised for people with naturally thin blood, as it also thins your blood, and the combined effect can be dangerous. Ginger is another natural anti-inflammatory. However, it is not as powerful as turmeric and is a little safer.

Capsaicin can help with pain the same way acupuncture does (more on that later), by creating minor pain which encourages the release of our bodies own natural painkillers. A capsule of capsaicin a day, or at every meal, can really take the edge of pain which is unrelated to inflammation. However, the relief is not as strong or as lasting as from conventional medication.

Valerian root is wonderful for stress-based pain. Valerian root is nature's sleeping pill, and

in very small doses it will help you relax. This makes it great for treating pain caused by stress. Because stress can make most pain worse, valerian root can also alleviate other types of back pain a little bit, though not much. Finally, as back pain can interfere with relaxation and sleep, and as poor sleep contributes to pain, valerian root can help you drift off into a natural sleep.



Tiger balms are great for tension. Tiger balm and dragon balm are Chinese medicinal ointments that you rub into the site of the pain. They apply capsaicin and other natural forms of pain relief and muscle relaxants to the area that is hurting, creating a warming sensation and genuine pain relief. Unlike most of the other entries, there is little limit to how much or how often you can apply tiger balm. You can get it in small tubs, or in sticky patches you can wear. However, it may not be effective for deep pain.

As we can see, both conventional and alternative medicines fall short in many ways when it comes to pain relief. Which is why we need to address more than just the pain itself: we need to work out why we have back pain in the first place and fight it at the source. Painkillers are a wonderful way of making sure we are able to fight the main ailment, but they are not a cure! If you want to truly help your back pain go away for good, you will need to try one of the following methods:

Heat therapy for back pain

Heat therapy is a wonderful but poorly understood practice. It is basically the application of something hot to the area that is hurting. This can ease inflammation and various types of

pain, from joint pains, to muscular pains, however it is not recommended for nerve pains or for people with sensitive skin.

Heat therapy works by encouraging blood flow. When heat is applied to an area the blood vessels expand, letting blood flow in larger amounts and faster. This works on several levels. First of all, it relieves tension, which will help with stress based and muscular pain. However, it also encourages fluid to move, which will ease arthritis pain, and the slight discomfort created by the heat triggers the release of natural endorphins, our body's own painkillers. Altogether, heat therapy will slightly relieve many types of pain at the source.

You can practice heat therapy in many ways. The simplest is applying a hot water bottle or another heated object to the sore part of our back. This provides a direct supply of heat for as long as the heat in the item lasts. For hot water bottles this can be a matter of hours, whereas for microwavable grain bags it may be an hour, and for chemical-based heat pockets it can be as little as twenty minutes. You can even invest in a heated blanket or an electrical heat pocket, but for safety reasons these will rarely get as hot as non-electric versions.



You can also apply the heat elsewhere if you know what your root cause is. For example, if you know your back pain is coming from tension in your hip, then applying the heat to your hip will relieve the tension, taking your back pain away. This is far more effective than treating the pain at the most painful spot, as it means that the source of pain is gone.

A hot bath or hot shower can also relieve back pain. The temperature you'd need would be quite hot, as hot as you can physically bear, but both are beneficial, even if a little

uncomfortable. A hot bath soothes all the muscles in your body and could really work if your pain isn't located in one area. It also means you can lie back and relax as your muscles ease, which may be pleasant for someone who has been sitting or on their feet all day. A shower provides the heat along with good, upright posture for people who are struggling with a stoop or with being hunched over. If your shower has a high pressure stream this can also be used to massage tense muscles up and down your back. Later on, we will see how proper massage therapy can also help back pain.

Self-heating tourmaline wraps are another good way of providing a steady release of heat. They do this by trapping and reflecting the heat of our own bodies, so they do not need refilling, charging, or reheating. The distinct advantage to them is that they are not bulky and do not need to be removed during the day, so you can wear them for continuous back pain relief at school, at work, or on the go. The heat they emit can be very strong, though, so often people find it more comfortable to wear them over a vest or t-shirt underneath their work clothes.

Deep heat sprays, tiger balms, and other things which replicate the sensation of heat do not work the same way as actual heat. Although they provide a warm sensation and relieve inflammation by promoting blood vessel dilation, they do not provide an actual increase in temperature beyond what your body would have if you had, for example, a fever. This is because the warmth is all coming from you! If this is enough to alleviate your pain then it is wonderful and very safe, but if they are not strong enough, consider using actual heat.

Cold therapy for back pain



The alternative to heat therapy is cold therapy. Cold therapy is when we apply cold directly

to the source of the pain. Unlike with heat therapy, applying the cold anywhere else does nothing at all, so make sure to really focus on where you feel the pain and nowhere else.

Cold therapy works by restricting blood flow, which alleviates inflammation and reduces the pain related to it. This makes it good against inflammation conditions, as well as during the early stages of an injury. It can also soothe and numb overactive nerves, easing that type of back pain. However, it is unwise to use cold therapy for pain where you do not know the cause of it, or for a recent injury. This is because inflammation is actually a good and healthy physical response. The collection of blood to a wounded area warms it up, much like with heat therapy, and provides it with nutrients. Not only that, but you have waste products taken away faster, and a steady supply of protective white blood cells, both of which can help prevent the formation of infection or necrotic tissue, which are actually still possible inside your body! So, unless you know the inflammation is unhealthy, or it is painfully tight, avoid using cold therapy.

The simplest way of applying cold therapy is using ice. Direct ice is not a good idea, but a wrapped ice pack can be. Direct ice would cause frostbite, but if you wrap a bag of ice in a fluffy towel you should get all the benefits of the coldest safe cold therapy, without any risk. Make sure to only apply the ice pack for five to ten minutes, then have three to five minutes away from it for your blood flow to return to normal before you apply it again.

If this is still too cold for you, consider an ice water flannel. Fill a basin with cold water and ice, and dip a flannel in it before wiping it over your back. You can also lie on your front and have someone place the cold flannel on the most affected area.

A cold shower is another great way of applying cold therapy. This is not something you want to do for a long time, but rather a short burst of very cold water at the end of your main shower. Make sure that the sore part of your back is in the stream of cold water, but not being directly hit by the flow. The slow running of icy cold water down your back should ease a lot of inflammation.

Unlike heat therapy, it is not wise to apply cold therapy for long periods of time. This is because mild heat therapy is a good thing, and as long as it is not causing pain a warm temperature is indefinitely bearable. On the other hand, the effects of cold build up over time, and can cause serious harm if left too long. And something cool enough to be bearable is not going to be cold enough to have much effect. The better idea is to use fairly extreme cold for brief stints, then have breaks from it.

Cooling sprays and menthol vapors create a sensation of coolness, but, once again, not actual cold. Again, the chemicals in them make you feel cooler on the surface of your skin, but they are not substantially cooling you on the inside. If you want something to really penetrate into the muscles and reduce inflammation, then you need actual cold.

Massage for back pain

Another great way of relieving back pain at its source is massage. A massage is when someone uses their hands or a tool to rub, squeeze, and knead around your back, in this case with the aim of relieving your back pain, or addressing an underlying health condition which is causing you to suffer back pain.

It is imperative, when handling pain and injuries, to see a specialist. You may know a

friend who “does really great massages”, or you may see this as an opportunity to get a little intimate with your partner, but if you are suffering from illness or injury, then a massage from an amateur could really hurt you. Someone who does not know about where your joints and tendons connect, what your muscles are, where your main blood vessels might be, etc., could easily push in the wrong place and cause you some serious harm. You need someone who is an expert.

There are massages for all types of pain. Anti-inflammatory massages focus on reducing the blood and water build up that happens due to inflammation. They do this by gently easing the fluid out of the area and back into the body, where it can be disposed of safely. Like with any anti-inflammatory treatment, you should only receive an anti-inflammatory massage if you know for sure that the inflammation is causing more harm than good.

Massages to relax tense or knotted muscles and release lactic acid are very common and popular. When we develop a physical, muscular problem which causes us back pain. This is because these are the one of most common types of pain you can develop from poor posture and inactivity. They are no substitute for adopting good posture, stretching before exercise, and staying active, of course. But if you do not follow the preventative measures closely then this sort of massage could help get you back on track, and allow you to make better choices in the future.



Joint-based massages are the other most common sort of massage. Many people will get these done by a physiotherapist, naturopath, or chiropractor, rather than at a spa. Massages to loosen up and align joints can be very useful where back pain is concerned. These massages focus on strategically relaxing the muscles and slowly exercising the joints over and over until they are as relaxed and flexible as your body allows. Some people find that after a proper massage to loosen their spine they are suddenly free of back pain and able to walk straighter than before. Do not underestimate how much these

massages can help. Again: prevention is better than a cure. If you get one of these massages make sure to spend plenty of time and energy keeping your posture great, so you don't need a joint-based massage for the foreseeable future.

Hot and cold massages exist as well, with two options as to where the temperature comes from: the room, or the massage aides. If the room is a source of heat, then you are probably enjoying a steam or sauna massage. This helps your whole body relax and is quite soothing. It can also allow the person performing the massage to really massage your muscles deeply, as they are relaxed. If the room is a source of cold, then you are probably enjoying a cold sauna massage. It reduces inflammation and improves blood supply around your body, encouraging it to heal efficiently. If there are warm massage aides these will be used like a hot water bottle, to treat and relax your entire body. If there are cold massage aides these will be focused on the painful parts of your back, to offer some relief.

Finally, even if massage does not or cannot directly help your pain, a stress relief massage will at least help. Massages make for wonderful stress relief, and alleviating stress is a great way of reducing sensitivity and tension, both of which can help with back pain. These do not need to be done by a specialist, but if this is the case then you will need to ask the person massaging you to avoid anywhere the pain is, so as to not cause any damage.

Yoga for back pain



Yoga is a very popular type of exercise for people treating health concerns. This is because it is hugely versatile. There are different types of yoga for different people and different needs, from beginner's yoga and light yoga for people with weaknesses, to specialized yoga for differently abled people, to intense yoga for bodybuilders and

meditative yoga for relaxation. When you have a health problem there are so many different variants of yoga and different poses that you can just pick what suits you, omit the rest, and still do well. This helps you to build your health *around* a chronic or persistent ailment, so you don't have to get better before you can begin exercising.

Where back pain is concerned, yoga is often the only sort of exercise that can be performed with little pain. A lot of exercise is fast, involves carrying or moving weights, or requires very specific movements. With yoga you can move slowly and securely, do not need to use weights, and can skip a movement if you find it is uncomfortable.

Beginning yoga, especially if your back pain is severe, you may want the support of your doctor and a qualified yoga teacher. They will be able to come together to tell you which poses are best and worst for your condition, and how you can build up strength and flexibility to alleviate your pain.

Always remember to stay within your limits, though. Nobody but you can tell you what hurts and what is comfortable. In all exercise you will need to push your limits a little, but actual pain is out of the question, especially when it's in the part of your back which was troubling you in the first place. Do not push past your pain, or push yourself beyond what you have energy to do. It is important to respect your body, otherwise you risk doing more harm than good.

If you are differently abled, or your back needs more support than your yoga instructor is used to, consider a special yoga class for differently abled people. Often these feature instructors who know what they are doing when it comes to different bodies and levels of ability. There may also be support structures and bands to help you get into the poses safely and comfortably.

The greatest benefits of yoga seem to happen when it is practiced often. At first it is recommended to follow a course or have sessions with your yoga instructor a few times a week. This way you learn the basics to do with staying active, safe, and fit, and then you are equipped to practice at home. The more often you can repeat your lessons, the better. Nightly yoga, even if it is just repeating the same steps as your last lesson, will go a long way towards alleviating back pain. What is more, if you keep practicing it after your back has healed it constitutes a preventative measure which may stop you suffering back pain again.

Even non-strenuous, meditative yoga can be hugely beneficial for a sufferer of back pain. Again, the benefit is largely de-stressing. By lightly stretching your muscles, relaxing, and meditating, you can help your body to release stress. Developing meditative yoga as a habit, rather than a form of exercise, can relieve some of your pain and help prevent you from developing stress-based back pain again in the future.

Walking for back pain

Walking is a hugely underestimated form of activity. It can be said that the human body is made for walking. Our most unique characteristics as a species evolved to allow us to walk upright, and to cover long distances by foot. Our earliest ancestors lived in nomadic villages walking from place to place with their food and tents on their backs. Up until the creation of motor vehicles anywhere that was not far away enough to use public transport you would have walked. Even the wealthy, who could afford horses, often walked places

daily. Walking is simply part of our genetic make-up.

What is more, walking is an activity we do every single day. Even though we do not walk as much as our ancestors did, of all the exercise we do, we will always walk the most. An almost completely sedentary person will still walk a little, even if they do nothing else. A person who hits the gym daily probably walks around a lot more. And on days where we do very little, walking is still part of our routine. So surely it makes sense that if we want to relieve our back pain, we focus on keeping good posture and movement when doing the one thing we do every single day?



Starting walking without a secondary purpose, if you do not walk often, can be confusing. Normally we walk because we have to. We need to go from one room to another. The elevator is broken. We are shopping. We are walking for something else. So, it can be a little shocking to start walking with the express intention of reaching your destination, turning around, then going back. Many people find it better to focus on the experience of the walk itself, on the sights and sounds, then on the place they are headed for. Try and enjoy it.

Even if you already walk every day, you may be surprised by how little you walk, or how poor your posture is. Do not overestimate what you can do, especially not the first time. Set yourself a target, but try and stay realistic, and make sure to focus on keeping a good posture for your back rather than walking a greater distance. Remember that this is all about taking tension out your back and making it strong and healthy to alleviate back pain.

Treadmills are not actually a bad option, but if you have back trouble sometimes an elliptical machine, or a roller mill, can be easier and more comfortable. This is because with a treadmill the machine sets the pace and you are forced to keep up with it. This means that the quality of your posture is sacrificed for the sake of speed. On the other

hand, a roller mill or an elliptical are entirely powered by you, so if you feel your posture slacking you can slow, pause, adjust, and carry on comfortably. Likewise, if you experience any pain: you can always stop when you're in complete control.

If you decide to walk in nature you will benefit from the stress relief, but you also put your back at risk. Walking on uneven ground which may be damp, loose, covered in leaves, or muddy means that you are continually adjusting not to slip. What is worse, you risk falling, which poses a huge threat to your back. When walking in nature with back pain, always go with someone else, wear hiking boots, and bring a staff with you for stability. Stick to paths and solid ground trails, and avoid places near running water. Do not go walking in nature in the fall if your back pain is severe or muscular.

Likewise, even though walking with kids and pets is usually a great way of getting some exercise, it is not recommended to walk with young kids you need to carry, or with pets on a leash. Small children can be very demanding in terms of energy, and you may find yourself chasing them, carrying them, or using child reins, all of which ruin your efforts at good posture. Likewise, a pet on a lead could pull, or at least distract you from your posture. For perfect posture when walking, make a point of going without distractions or physical burdens. At the very most, listen to some music.

Some differently abled people may feel that walking is not relevant to them because they are not using their legs, or are using their legs differently. But I would definitely expand this category of movement to encompass any way a person may have of moving around on a daily basis. Whether you are skating, wheeling, moving along on your hands and stumps, etc., you are doing this movement every single day. It is important to do it well, and make sure that your back is protected so that you can recover from any pain safely.

Speak to your doctor about how someone with your body can protect and strengthen their back. Make a point of moving around in your own way with no other purpose than practicing your posture and strengthening your back. Just because you aren't walking doesn't mean you will not benefit from "a walk"!

Aromatherapy for back pain

A great source of alternative remedies is aromatherapy. Aromatherapy is a treatment which focuses on the use of essential oils: oils extracted from plants carefully, to preserve many of their vital components. These oils are then used in food, perfumes, on skin, etc., for their medicinal properties. Because aromatherapy deals with highly concentrated doses of medicinal plants, it is possible to use aromatherapy instead of standard herbal remedies, or even in conjunction with them.

Aromatherapy for pain relief is pretty standard across the board. You can choose to enjoy the oils topically, in food, in a steam bath, or diffused in the air. Topical application of the oils can be done around your face to provide the benefits of the scent, or around the area where you experience pain so that the oil can act more directly against the pain. Eating essential oils in foods provides you with a huge pump of micronutrients, but you need to be careful when consuming essential oils. Always make sure to buy them from a reputable seller, and only to eat food grade essential oils, which should be clearly marked. Steam baths and diffusers both work by getting the oil into the air, although they serve different purposes. A steam bath carries a much stronger, shorter dose of the oil, whereas a diffuser puts trace amounts of the oil into the air continually. Which suits you best depends

entirely on which you feel the most benefit from. Likewise, when it comes to the specific oils: There is a wide range available, and the right one to pick depends on what you need it for, and which one works for you.

Basil is great if your back ache is from poor posture or exercising too much. It relaxes the muscles and allows lactic acid to leave the body. Lactic acid leaving the body may feel uncomfortable at first, and some people even report feeling sick, but the end result is great: complete relaxation and faster healing from exercise. Use your basil in a steam bath or food grade basil essential oil as a cold supplement.



Marjoram as an essential oil works on two levels for back pain. It has a scent which eases stress and soothes you, taking away excess tension and encouraging healthy blood flow. However, when applied topically it can also provide relief from discomfort in both your joints and your muscles, making it a perfect essential oil for back pain.

Eucalyptus, ginger, and peppermint are all powerfully anti-inflammatory in essential oil

form as well as in natural form. And for destressing there is nothing better than lavender. Make sure you are not allergic to your essential oils before using them by applying a small drop to your skin and observing it for a day, though!

Acupuncture for back pain

Acupuncture is a Chinese medicine practice which involves inserting thin needles at specific points of our bodies to direct our life force, or Qi, into the right parts of the body, correcting imbalance. It can be said that the way we lead our lives and the back pain we suffer as a consequence are perfect examples of that imbalance within us. Even if you do not believe in Qi, it appears that acupuncture stimulates the deactivation of certain nerves and the production of pain-relieving hormones which would help sufferers of chronic pains.

Back pain is one of the top reasons people seek acupuncture treatments. Most people end up being return customers because of the short term relief it provides. Make sure to discuss acupuncture with your doctor, especially if you are pregnant or have any artificial body parts. However, if you wish to avoid repeat visits, you will still want to engage in the preventative measures, to protect yourself against developing back pain again in the future. Most people will develop their back pain again despite treatment because they do not change the habits which caused the back pain in the first place.

In closing

It is important to always remember that we only get one body, and that our back is the stem from which the rest of our body grows. Without a healthy back everything, from exercise to sex, from working to even sitting, can be compromised. If you are suffering from back pain, you must not write it off as “just something that happens to some people”. It is vital to work out where it is coming from, to treat it, and to prevent it from happening again.

Any number of traditional, herbal, or alternative remedies can be used to treat and prevent back pain, and in most combinations, but always make sure to talk to your doctor about your intentions before pursuing them. Some of these remedies may be incompatible, or you may have a health condition which prevents you from pursuing one of them. On the other hand, your doctor may also be able to direct you towards alternative remedies which will be ideal for you, and give you the details of licensed massage therapists or acupuncturists who can help you with your back pain. Fortunately, we live in a world where many doctors are much more accepting of traditional remedies and alternative medicine, so if your doctor is resistant to all of it, see if you can get a new doctor who is more knowledgeable about natural healthcare, to support and guide you in healing your back pain.