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Myths and Misconceptions About Back Pain

Myths and Misconceptions About Back Pain

While sometimes easy to diagnose and treat, back pain can also be very complex. The source of the pain can be due to single, or multiple causes. Consequently, it can be difficult to diagnose the cause of the pain. Each pain source has a wide variety of treatment options that must be considered. And your treatment may be completely unique from someone else.

There are many structures in the lower back that can cause severe pain. These include muscles, ligaments, tendons, bones, joints and discs. The outer rim of the disc can be a significant source of back pain due to its rich nerve supply and tendency towards injury.

During our development, there is a great deal of overlap of nerve supply to all of these structures. This makes it nearly impossible for the brain to distinguish between injury to one structure versus another. For example, a torn or herniated disc can feel identical to a bruised muscle or ligament injury. This is where an examination into the cause of the pain is important; each of these different structures may need a different type of treatment to resolve your pain.

There are common myths and misconceptions about back pain. This article is designed to “set the record straight.”

Myth #1

“It will never happen to me.”

Statistics show that approximately eight out of ten people will experience back pain at some point in their lifetime. Back pain is the leading cause of disability in men over 45. It's the second most common reason for a visit to a primary care doctor, the third most frequent reason for surgery, and the fifth most frequent cause of hospitalization. Back pain occurs in children as well as adults. As we age, we become more inflexible and lose some of our muscle support. At the same time, the incidence of back pain increases. It's one of the major areas of pain in almost all sports. From professional football, base-

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ball, basketball and soccer, to sports like gymnastics, swimming and even professional ballroom dancing, back pain is a common factor to deal with.

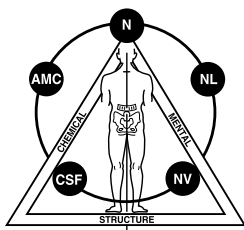
Myth #2

“I am in great shape, so I will never have back pain.”

Individuals who exercise and take care of themselves are less likely to have back pain than those “couch potatoes” among us. However, back pain can affect everyone, regardless of the level of activity. For exam-

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ple, sports such as golf and running are well known for causing back pain. That's not to say you shouldn't participate in these sports. Rather, you should take into consideration your back when conditioning yourself for them. This conditioning should take into account your posture, flexibility and strength. Your pelvis and spine need to create a stable platform from which the arms and legs work. The muscles of posture, those that hold us erect, have a tendency to weaken with age. This is part of the reason we lose vertical height. As these muscles become weaker, greater stress is applied to the ligaments and other structures of the back. When these muscles are weak, activities such as vacuuming, shoveling, getting groceries out of the car, or just bending over the sink may become painful.

Myth #3
“My pain is so bad that I know I need surgery.”

The severity of pain from lower back injuries is often unrelated to the extent of physical damage present. Muscle spasm from a simple back strain can cause excruciating pain and may limit one's ability to walk or even stand. Conversely, a large herniated disc may be completely painless.

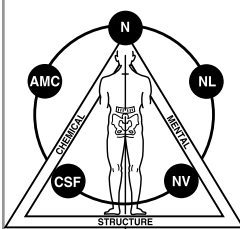
Much like the sharp pain you immediately feel when touching a hot iron, the level of acute pain correlates to the level of damage. However, chronic pain (lasting longer than six weeks) does not typically correlate with the amount of damage.

Back injuries are a common cause of disability. And, even though rarely life threatening, the annual cost in terms of lost productivity, medical expenses and workers' compensation benefits runs into the tens of billions of dollars annually in the United States.

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Although back pain is common, it's also quite possible for you to prevent most back problems with simple steps such as exercise and adopting new ways to sit and stand. Even if you've injured your back before, you can learn techniques to help avoid recurrent injuries.

In the office, we are interested in not only finding the cause of your back pain, but also helping you to develop good preventative measures. Given 80% of Americans have problems with their back, don't be surprised if you are among them. Work with us to help develop good patterns of stretching, exercise and posture to minimize your chances of another bout with this common problem.



Applied Kinesiology

Is a diagnostic tool using the muscle structure of the body to aid in the examination of a patient. Its use allows immediate feedback, aiding the doctor in making decisions on what type of care the patient needs.