



AMERICAN  
CHIROPRACTIC  
ASSOCIATION

# HEALTHY LIVING

## Tips for a Healthy Spine

A healthy spine is an often-overlooked and essential part of a healthy lifestyle. Unfortunately, approximately 80% of the population suffers from spinal pain at some point. People who are overweight or obese, and who smoke, lift heavy objects, or had a previous episode of back pain, are more likely to experience back pain.

Because so many people suffer from spine pain, it's important for you to try to keep your spine as healthy as possible. Following simple posture, lifting, and healthy lifestyle guidelines can help you keep your back in good shape.

The American Chiropractic Association recommends the following spinal health tips:

### STANDING

- When standing, keep one foot slightly in front of the other, with your knees slightly bent. This position helps to take the pressure off your low back.
- Keep your head level. Your earlobes should be in line with your shoulders. Do not push your head forward, backward or to the side.
- Shift your weight from your toes to your heels, or one foot to the other, if you have to stand for a long time.

### LIFTING

- At all times, avoid twisting while lifting. Twisting is one of the most dangerous movements for your spine, especially while lifting.
- If the item is too heavy to lift, pushing it is easier on your back than pulling it. Whenever possible, use your legs, not your back or upper body, to push the item.
- If you must lift a heavy item, get someone to help you.



## What is the Spine?

**The spine is an integral part of the body.** The spine is our backbone, which extends from the neck to the tailbone. The spine consists of 33 relatively small bones, called vertebrae.

The neck, also called the cervical spine, consists of 7 vertebrae. There are 12 vertebrae in the upper and mid-back (thoracic spine), and 5 in the low back, or lumbar spine. Five bones fuse together in the tailbone region to form the sacrum, and below that is the coccyx, formed by 4 bones.

The spine houses and protects the spinal cord, absorbing shock and allowing us to bend and twist. Hundreds of muscles, ligaments and tendons are attached to the spine, as well.



# Text neck?

While it might not seem like much, **looking down at our phone for hours and hours is a really big issue.** That prolonged position puts stress on your cervical spine and causes pain in the neck – literally.

ACA recommends that you rest your elbow on your abdomen and hold the phone straight out in front of your eyes.

## SITTING

- Keep your knees slightly lower than your hips, with your head up and back straight.
- Avoid rolling your shoulders forward (slouching).
- Try to maintain the natural curve in your low back.

## REACHING & BENDING

- When reaching for something above shoulder level, stand on a stool. Straining to reach such objects may not only hurt your mid-back and neck, but it can also bring on shoulder problems.
- Do NOT bend over at the waist to pick up items from the floor or a table.
- Instead, kneel down on one knee, as close as possible to the item you are lifting, with the other foot flat on the floor and pick the item up.
- Or bend at the knees, keep the item close to your body, and lift with your legs, not your back.

## SLEEPING

- Sleeping on your back puts approximately 50 pounds of pressure on your spine. Other positions, such as a side position, may be better.

- Placing a pillow under your knees while lying on your back cuts the pressure on your spine roughly in half.
- Lying on your side with a pillow between your knees may also reduce the pressure on your back.
- Never sleep in a position that causes a portion of your spine to hurt. Most often, your body will tell you what position is best.

## TECHNOLOGY

- When texting, bring your arms up in front of your eyes so that you don't need to look down to see the screen.
- When using a computer or mobile device, look down with your eyes, and if you wear glasses, make sure you also can scan the entire screen without moving your head.
- When sitting at a device, make sure your feet are firmly flat on the floor or footrest with your knees lower than your hips. Make sure you can use the device without reaching.
- Never pinch the phone between your ear and shoulder. Use a headset to reduce shoulder strain.

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