

# Forward-thinking tips for back pain

January 19 2017

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(HealthDay)—Back pain is common but not inevitable, an orthopedist says.

Roughly eight out of 10 people will suffer significant back pain at least once in their lifetime—but there are ways to reduce the risk, said Dr. Mark Knaub of Penn State Hershey Medical Center.

Muscle, ligament or tendon strains (soft tissue injuries) are the most common causes of back pain. These injuries can occur from falls or activities involving lifting, twisting or bending, said Knaub, chief of the [medical center](#)'s adult orthopedic spine service.

When pain strikes, you can ease it with anti-inflammatory drugs and muscle relaxants. And [physical therapy](#) can reduce the risk of back pain becoming chronic, he suggested.

"Physical therapy can give you techniques to lessen your symptoms in the short term, and get you back to being active and mobile," Knaub said in a Penn State news release.

"In the intermediate to long term, it can strengthen the core muscles that support the spine, and that could decrease the likelihood of having another episode in the future," he added.

It's not always possible to prevent back pain, but certain things can reduce your risk. These include regular exercise (especially workouts that strengthen the core muscles), maintaining a healthy weight, and avoiding tobacco products, Knaub said.

People in jobs that subject them to vibrations—such as truck drivers and heavy machine operators—are at increased risk for back pain. So are people with mental health disorders, such as depression, he noted.

"When people have chronic back problems, there is a large psychological component to it. Being depressed causes pain, and being in pain makes you depressed," Knaub said.

Some studies have found that cognitive behavioral therapy—a type of talk therapy—can work as well as traditional medical treatments for that type of back pain, he suggested.

"If you lack coping mechanisms and don't handle the [pain](#) and stress well, that can feed into your anxiety," Knaub said.

**More information:** The U.S. National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases has more on [back pain](#).

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Citation: Forward-thinking tips for back pain (2017, January 19) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-01-forward-thinking-pain.html>

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