



Support Your Spine

Do you experience
backache, neck pain,
slipped disks or
other spinal problems?

If so, it's time to learn how
to create a healthy, pain-free spine.

Problems with the spine are so common that nearly everyone experiences them at some point in their life. Statistics suggest that about 80% of the population will experience back pain, and the older you get, the more likely back pain becomes. Back pain is the leading cause of lost work days in the United States and Americans spend about \$50 billion dollars yearly on treatment for it. Low back pain is also the leading cause of disability worldwide.

What Causes Back Pain?

Back pain or backache can be caused by many things. The most common form is pain in the lower back, also known as lumbago. Structural imbalances, caused by poor posture, are a common cause. Excess weight, straining the back by lifting heavy things, muscle tension or spasms and a general lack of physical fitness all contribute to the problem.

Back injuries or osteoarthritis in the spine are sometimes the cause, but most back pain is mechanical in nature. In fact, 54% of Americans with back pain spend their day working at a desk, not lifting heavy objects or doing other heavy work that could injure the back.

Interestingly, 50% of people with chronic low back pain have no structural damage and 50% of people with herniated disk have no back pain. This leads many to believe that back pain has more to do with stress and general inflammation than tissue damage. In the natural world, nutritional deficiencies, poor kidney function and even emotional issues, such as fear or depression can contribute to back problems.

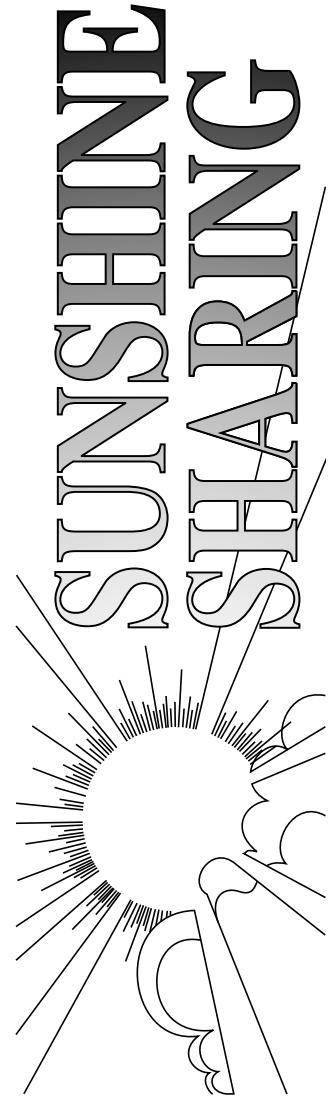
Nerves, Emotions and Your Backbone

Your spine is more than just a structural support that lets you stand upright and move; it's also a protective conduit for your nerves. Spinal problems don't just cause backaches, they also interfere with nerve signals, which can create problems throughout the body.

Since the spinal column is closely connected with the nervous system, it makes sense that mood affects the health and function of the spine. A healthy spine is associated with courage and fortitude, as shown by the phrase "show some backbone." And standing straight and tall is associated with integrity, which is why it is referred to it as uprightness.

If you don't feel good about yourself, it's hard to stand up straight or hold your head up high. It's easier to hang your head, lean forward and slump down. As we'll explain inside, all of this stresses the back and increases the risk of spinal problems and back pain.

On the pages that follow we'll discuss both physical and emotional issues related to the spine and share with you some secrets to maintaining a healthy spine, one that is free from problems and pain.



Your guide to better health the natural way.

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Important Notice

The information in *Sunshine Sharing* is for educational purposes only and should not be used to diagnose and treat diseases. If you have a health problem, we recommend you consult a competent health practitioner before embarking on any course of treatment.

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Managing Editor/Writer: Steven Horne
Editor: David Horne
Associate Editors: Carolyn Hughes,
Leslie Lechner

Exploring the Causes of Back Pain



In order to understand what causes back pain and what you can do about it, it is important to understand the structure of the back and how it works. Your spinal column is a marvel of structural engineering. It is designed to hold the body

upright, but unlike a rigid column or pole, it also has to be able to bend and move.

To allow this to happen, the backbone is composed of many smaller bones called vertebrae, which are held in place by ligaments, tendons and muscles. These muscles exist in pairs, which help to balance the spine and hold it erect. When the spine moves, muscles on one side contract, while the muscles on the other side relax and stretch.

Posture and the Spine

When you are standing up straight, the weight of the upper body is distributed down the spine and the muscle tension is balanced on each side of the body. When you're not standing erect, or holding your head up straight, the muscles in the spine are forced to hold up the weight of your body and/or head against gravity. Muscles on one side of the body are tensing against the force of gravity, while muscles on the other side are permanently contracted and unable to stretch.



The picture to the right demonstrates this imbalance with poor front to back alignment, which stresses the spine. You can also have poor side to side alignment, which puts a curve into the spine. Scoliosis is the extreme of this imbalanced curve of the spine from side to side.

Spasms and Back Pain

Those muscles, which are forced to work excessively hard in order to hold parts of the body up against gravity due to poor posture, become chronically tense. They can even become exhausted and go into spasms. These cramps or spasms can create severe pain in various parts of the back, which is designed to force you to become immobile so the muscle can rest.

Magnesium allows muscles to relax, so chronic muscle tension is often a sign of magnesium deficiency. If you have spastic pains in your back, shoulders or neck, try taking at least 400-800 mg. of **magnesium**. You can also take muscle relaxing herbs like **kava kava** and **blue vervain**. Massaging **lobelia** extract into tense muscles is also helpful as explained in the sidebar *Herbal Back Adjustment*.

Disk Problems

In between the vertebrae are the spinal disks, donut-shaped cushions, whose soft centers are encased in a tougher exterior. The spinal disks carry the weight of the upper body from one vertebrae to the next, while allowing the vertebrae to move so the spine can flex.



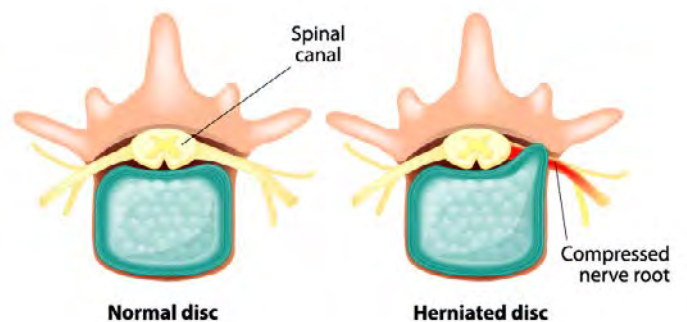
When the spine is chronically curved, it places excessive stress on one part of the disk. Instead of being distributed evenly across the disk, the weight is pushed to one side. As the disks are chronically distressed, especially in someone with a nutrient deficient diet, they start to wear out. They may bulge out and eventually rupture as shown in the illustration. They may also thin out so they no longer provide adequate cushioning between the vertebrae. As disks weaken, osteoarthritis may occur causing further deterioration of the spine.

Nerves and the Spine

The spinal column is also the protective housing for the spinal cord, which carries nerve impulses from the brain to the body and from the body back to the brain. Peripheral nerves exit the spinal column in between the vertebrae. These nerves are what allow you to feel and move and they also help to regulate the function of all of your organs and glands.

Poor alignment of the spinal column can put pressure on the nerves, which is why chiropractic care or other body work that helps to better align the spinal vertebrae often appears to help the function of internal organs like digestion, breathing and circulation. People who do exercises that help to stretch and align the back, such as yoga, also notice overall improvement of body function.

When the misalignment becomes severe enough to cause disks to slip or rupture, more noticeable problems occur. Slipped or ruptured disks put pressure on nerves which can cause neck, arm or leg pain. There may even be sensations of numbness or tingling in parts of the body supplied by those nerves. Muscles may even weaken, impairing movement.





Herbal Back Adjustment

A very effective way to ease tension in the back muscles is to do an herbal back adjustment. This procedure can help the spine to come into better alignment, ease spasms causing back pain and release tension so the spine can move more freely.

In some cases, this relaxing of the muscles will allow subluxations (misaligned vertebrae) to correct themselves with stretching exercises. At the very least it will make chiropractic adjustments or other spinal alignment work easier to perform.

Start by mixing **lobelia** and **capsicum** extracts in equal parts. Massage them into the muscles on both sides of the spine. Lobelia

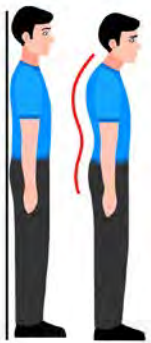
helps relax muscle spasms and capsicum draws blood into the area. Both help to ease pain.

After massaging the capsicum/lobelia mixture into the spine you can follow it up with a **Topical Analgesic Blend** containing essential oils like menthol, camphor and wintergreen. You can also use an **Enzyme Spray** on the back to help drive the herbs and oils into the tissues more effectively.

For added benefit, soak a towel in hot water (bath temperature) and wring it out until mostly dry. Then lay out the warm, moist towel on the back to further drive the herbs into the muscles.

This technique can also be done on neck and shoulders or any other part of the body where there is pain associated with muscle tension or spasms.

Natural Approaches to a Healthy Spine



Here are some ways to avoid back problems and help to reverse them when they occur.

Straighten Up Your Act

Since poor posture is a major contributor to back problems, do things to improve your posture. For example, practice standing straight by standing with your back against a wall. Stretch out your back and try to align your back against the wall as suggested by the illustration.

Also practice sitting up straight when working at a computer or desk. Move the computer monitor so it is at eye level to keep your head straight as shown in the illustration.



Make Sure Your Hips are Aligned

Check the alignment of your hips by standing in front of a mirror and placing your fingers on the hip bones on both sides of your body. Notice if they are level. If they are not (that is, if one hip is higher than the other), this could be causing your back pain. It can also cause neck and shoulder pain because the pelvis is the foundation for the spine. If the pelvis is out of alignment, then the whole spine will be stressed all the way to the neck.

If your pelvis is out of alignment, body work along with exercise and improving your posture will often correct the alignment. Seek out a chiropractor who works with muscles and connective tissue, a well-trained massage therapist who can

do deep tissue work or other body worker who can assist you in getting your pelvis and spine in alignment.

Stretch and Move Your Spine

Practice bending and stretching your spine in different directions to keep it flexible. If you work at a desk or sit a lot, try stretching backwards as shown in the photo. This helps to balance the muscles on both sides of the spine, which alleviates tension and fatigue.

If you're really stiff, try the herbal back adjustment (above) and get some body work done to help loosen up your back. Chiropractic care, massage therapy or yoga may be helpful.



Mood and Posture

Your mood and your posture are connected. When you feel discouraged, sad or depressed you are more likely to hang your head and slump forward. When you feel confident, happy and motivated you are more likely to stand tall and hold your head up high.

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) this forward slumping posture due to depression and sadness is called "sagging qi,"

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Additional Help and Information

For more information about spinal problems and back pain contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

Crooked: Outwitting the Back Pain Industry and Getting on the Road to Recovery by Cathryn Jakobson Ramin

Fifteen Surefire Tips for Relieving Back Pain (Plus 192 Others, Just in Case) by Andrew Scott Kirschner D.O.

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AskMara.com & Energy Wellness Products

Mara Gerke

9898 N 200 E, Decatur, IN 46733

Phone: 800-728-2425

Website: <http://www.askmara.com/>

Email: askmara@gmail.com



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which could be translated as sagging energy. A TCM **Sagging Qi Formula** can help you stand upright and feel better about yourself. It contains herbs like perilla, cyperus, chih-shih fruit, citrus peel and bupleurum to help lift energy and improve mood.

Interestingly enough, research shows that while mood affects posture, posture also affects mood. When a person stands or sits up straight, plants their feet firmly on the floor and throws their shoulders back, they will actually feel more confident and positive. Try it and see how you feel.

Back Pain and Kidney Qi



In Traditional Chinese medicine the kidneys are said to build the bones, meaning that water and good kidney function is considered essential to a healthy structural system and especially to the bones. Water lubricates the joints and keeps the disks between the vertebrae hydrated. Dehydration thins the disks and stresses the joints. So, if you have back pain, make sure you are drinking enough pure water every day.

The kidneys also help to maintain balance between the fluids of the body and the minerals needed for healthy structure. In TCM, a deficiency of kidney qi (energy) can cause not only back pain, but weakness of the legs, knees and ankles.

A **Water Increasing Formula**, containing key herbs like eucommia, cistanche, dipsacus (teasel), morinda and rehmanina, can be used to tonify (or increase) the kidney qi to ease back pain and strengthen the bones and joints in general. Where there is water retention a **Water Decreasing Formula**, containing key herbs like hoelen, siler root, chaenomeles and morus, may be helpful.

Inflammation and Back Pain

Since back pain can involve inflammation, it can also be helpful to take anti-inflammatory herbs and remedies if there is heat and swelling of tissues in the back. Look for an **Anti-inflammatory Formulas** containing turmeric or curcumin, boswellia, white willow bark and/or mangosteen pericarp and take it at least twice each day.



Healing Disk Problems

When the disks between the vertebrae are bulging, better posture, stretching exercises and body work such as chiropractic care will help them realign. Even when they rupture or herniate, surgery is not usually the best option. You want to help the disks heal and then work on improving posture and spinal flexibility.

One of the best ways to speed the healing of herniated disks is to apply a poultice over the area where the injured disk is. A good **Poultice Blend** contains mucilaginous herbs like slippery elm and plantain as a base. It can also contain tissue-healing herbs like goldenseal and yarrow. Mix the herbs with a little water or aloe vera gel to make a thick paste and apply it over the affected area at night before going to bed. Cover with a gauze pad and tape in place. Remove it in the morning. You can apply another poultice during the day if you like, but you need to change the poultice at least twice daily.

Goldenseal, in particular, has been used topically to help disks to heal more quickly. So, either include goldenseal in the poultice or just put a goldenseal extract on a gauze pad and apply topically. Goldenseal contains a yellow dye, so be careful not to get in on your clothes.

Many people have also reported that using the **Enzyme Spray** topically on the back has eased pain and promoted healing.