

[IMAGE]

Keep Your Spine in Shape

By Editorial Staff

Your spine is the backbone of your entire body – literally and figuratively. That means poor spine health can negatively impact you from head to toe. How can you keep your spine in shape? Let's learn more about this critical anatomical structure and take a look at some of the simple strategies you can employ to ensure a healthy spine and a healthy body.

Exercises (to Do and Not to Do): Since we're talking shape here, let's start with a few exercises that help promote spinal health in the form of proper posture – along with a few that promote poor posture and put the spine at risk. First, a strong core supports the spine, whereas a weak core can lead to pain and injury. To build the core, think planks, bent-leg knee raises, stability ball exercises, ab curls, medicine ball slams and other exercises that strengthen the core muscles (remembering to keep your spine protected at all times by avoiding rounding the back / neck). On the other hand, avoid exercises / movements that unduly stress the spine: slumping while sitting and bending forward immediately after sitting come to mind, as do exercises that make you prone to rounding your back (traditional sit-ups, toe-touches, etc.).

Sleep Matters: Your sleep position and the overall quality of your sleep play a big role in spinal health. The ideal position for the spine during sleep places you on your back with a pillow between your legs. As you might imagine, lying on your stomach is the worse position. Your pillow and mattress also matter, so make sure you choose the right ones for you, or your spine will let you know with neck and/or back pain. (Talk to your chiropractor for suggestions.)

healthy spine - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark *Nutrition Essentials:* Believe it or not, certain foods promote a healthy spine (and vice versa). For example, adequate water intake is necessary to nourish not only the body's cells, but also the spinal intervertebral discs, which consist primarily of water at birth. As you might imagine, water helps keep the discs (and thus the spine) from getting stiff and subject to injury. In addition, an anti-inflammatory diet is key to preventing back pain and other spine problems due to inflammation. Think foods such as omega-3 fish and lean proteins, fresh produce, avocado, olive oil, and various spices while reducing intake of pro-inflammatory foods (most fast foods and processed foods, sugar-laden sweets, etc.).

Chiropractic Care: No conversation about spine health would be complete without mentioning chiropractic, an entire health care profession founded on the principle that a healthy, properly aligned spine has far-reaching effects on the entire body. Research asserts chiropractic's effectiveness in treating back pain, neck pain and various other musculoskeletal conditions, and the goal of periodic chiropractic care is to maintain spinal health, optimize the body's self-healing capacities, and thus prevent pain from returning. If you haven't been to a chiropractor yet, what are you waiting for? If you've visited one, but haven't returned in awhile, remember: your spine – and your entire body – deserve it.

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