

body matters

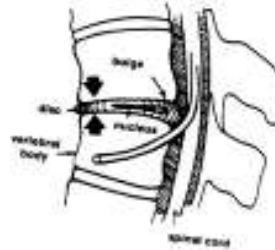
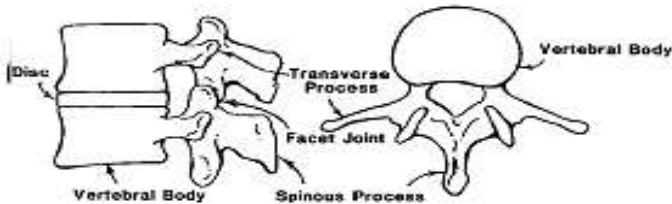
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Back pain: the facts

Back pain is very common. A survey published in 2000 reported that nearly half the population had experienced low back pain lasting for at least a day in the previous year. Whilst for the majority of sufferers, the condition is not serious, and the condition recovers, it can cause disruption to home and work lives, and result in unpleasant discomfort. We show you how to avoid the problem in the first place.

Background

The spine is made up of 33 bones known as vertebrae. The majority are separated from each other by discs which act as shock absorbers and allow movement. These discs are made of a gel-like substance (the nucleus) surrounded by an elastic, fibrous outer covering (the annulus), which extends from one vertebra to the one below. Prolonged poor posture (particularly sitting in a slumped position) can weaken the annulus and allow the nucleus to protrude or push out. This is known as a prolapsed intervertebral disc (PIVD), or more commonly, a slipped disc. Other mechanical causes of back pain include irritation or locking of the small side joint (facet or apophyseal joints), inflammation of the nerve root which emerges from between the vertebrae, malalignment of the pelvic (sacro-iliac) joints or dysfunction of the coccyx (tail) bones. These problems often cause the muscles which are close to the back to go into painful spasm as a protective mechanism.



Lumbar Discs

Slipped Discs

Avoiding Back Pain

There are a number of ways in which you can reduce your likelihood of developing low back pain:

- Those who are obese, smoke and who have poor general levels of fitness are more likely to develop low back pain: improve your general health and you will reduce its incidence.
- If you have had low back pain before, you are more likely to develop it again: you need to take preventative steps (see below).
- If you take part in heavy physical work, frequent lifting, twisting, pushing, pulling and bending, ensure that you are fit for this work and abide by manual handling regulations and advice. Repetitive work, static postures and exposure to vibration should be minimised.
- Those who are subject to stress, anxiety, depression, poor job satisfaction and mental stress are more susceptible: try to reduce these factors.

Attached to the spine are a number of muscles (the deep core) which act like an active corset to stabilise the spine and pelvis, reducing the likelihood of back pain. These muscles are often inhibited after an episode of back pain, so need to be re-educated to help prevent recurrence. Specific core stability exercises or pilates are good ways of working your deep core. Those who perform heavy tasks, or sports at a competitive level will need higher levels of core stability training.

For further information on core stability, go to www.ruislipphysio.com

