

Protect Your Back & Joints



CHALLENGE
Follow these recommendations to protect your back & joints this month.



Requirements to

Complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Keep a written record of the days you protect your back and joints.
2. Log it on your monthly Health Challenge Calendar.
3. Read "Ouch! Why does my body hurt?" and "How to protect your joints."
4. To complete the Challenge, you must use proper lifting techniques every time, exercise at least 5 days a week, and follow the suggestions to protect your back and joints.
5. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

Ouch! Why does my body hurt?

Your body structure is made up of 206 bones. Your back alone has 30 bones! Bones are held together by strong elastic bands called ligaments. Wherever two bones meet, you have a joint – supported and protected by a flexible, rubbery tissue called cartilage. Joints allow your body to be flexible and to move when your muscles pull on your bones. Muscles are connected to your bone by tough bands of fibrous tissue called tendons. All of these form your musculoskeletal system.

Your spinal cord and nerves provide the pathway for messages to travel to and from your brain and the other parts of your body. Nerves control your muscles and tendons. They transport messages from your brain, through your spinal cord, and to your muscles and other tissues. Nerves also deliver messages back to your brain.

Receptor nerve cells in and beneath your skin sense heat, cold, light, touch, pressure, and pain. You have thousands of these receptor cells. Most sense pain. When there is an injury to your body – such as a pulled muscle or inflamed joint – these tiny cells send warning messages along nerves into your spinal cord and then up to your brain. You sense pain and know that something may be wrong in your body.

Most people have experienced some joint or back pain. It is one of the most common medical problems in the United States. For many, the pain is caused from straining or spraining the muscle or ligaments – often the result of lifting something improperly, overuse, being excessively overweight, or having poor posture. Joint pain can also be caused by a sudden, awkward movement, such as sneezing unexpectedly or twisting “wrong.” Long-lasting pain can result from injury during a collision or other accident. Disk degeneration, illness, infection, and inherited conditions can also cause joint pain.

A recent study found that the prevalence of back pain has more than doubled in the last 14 years. Why?

- **Increasing rates of obesity.** Obesity puts additional strain on the back and limits physical activity, which is needed for maintaining strong stomach and back muscles.
- **Changes in work life.** Today, most people in the workforce sit through the day, usually at a computer.
- **Sitting for long periods** can be hard on the back. The human body is not structured for long periods of sitting. Sitting forces the weight of the top half of your body onto a small section of your lower back, stressing the muscles, tendons, and ligaments that support your spine.
- **Decreased fitness levels** in the general population.
- **Increased rates of depression,** which seem to make back pain more of a problem. One study showed that people who developed depression were 3 times more likely to develop chronic back pain in the next 2 years than those without depression.



How to protect your joints

While you can't control heredity, there are many things you can control that will help protect your joints.

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being excessively overweight increases your risk of joint problems. If you are overweight, losing just 10-15 pounds can help a lot.
- **Exercise regularly** – at least 5 days each week. Although you may think exercising irritates joints, it actually does the opposite. Exercise strengthens the muscles surrounding your joints, reducing the risk of pain. But pay attention to how your body feels while you're using exercise equipment. You should feel the exercise in your muscles not your lower back and joints. If you have osteoarthritis or another chronic condition, consider swimming or doing other water exercises. Low-impact exercises such as bicycling or walking are good options if you feel stiff or achy. And remember to stretch at least twice a week.



- **Avoid back injuries while sitting.** Sit in alignment with your feet supported, hips level or slightly below the knees, spine vertical or slightly reclined, and a small arch in the lower back. If you're sitting at a computer,

your shoulders should be relaxed; elbows by your side, bent to about 90 degrees; your wrists in a neutral position (not bent up, down or away from each other); and your head facing forward without protruding forward. Stretch or walk around the office every hour or so. If possible, stand for part of the day – perhaps when you are on the phone.

- **Use proper lifting techniques.** Bend your knees and squat to pick up an object. Keep your back straight and hold the object close to your body. Avoid twisting your body when lifting. Push rather than pull when you need to move heavy objects. If it's too heavy to move comfortably, get help!
- **Practice good posture.** At the risk of sounding like your mother – don't slouch. Good posture keeps your bones from rubbing against each other. Your body should be aligned as if a string was pulling it from the top of your head.

Read *Quick Tips for a Healthier Back:*
www.wellsourc.info/wn/back-tips.pdf



- **Eat healthfully.** In general, a bone-healthy diet means you are eating just enough calories to maintain a healthy weight and eating the optimal amounts of protein, calcium, and vitamin D. You can do this by eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, legumes and other healthy proteins, and low-fat or nonfat dairy or calcium-fortified soymilk and juice.
- **Be smoke-free.** Your bones, joints, ligaments, and tendons need oxygen and nutrients to be healthy. Cigarettes contain carbon monoxide, a poisonous chemical that sticks to the oxygen-carrying part of your blood, decreasing the amount of oxygen that gets carried throughout your body. In addition, nicotine in cigarettes restricts blood flow by thickening blood vessel walls, further decreasing the oxygen and nutrients that reach your back and joints. Numerous studies have shown that smoking increases the risk of debilitating back pain.

With proper care, your back and joints should give you years of use!

Source: *British Society for Rheumatology; American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons; Spine; University of Illinois; National Institutes of Health. 2010.*



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Follow these recommendations to protect your back & joints this month.

Instructions

1. Post the Health Challenge Calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Use this calendar to record your exercise program (min/day as well as type of exercise), weekly weight, and any other items you may want to track.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you protected your back and joints. To meet this challenge, you must protect your back and joints on at least 22 days this month. Then keep up this health practice for a lifetime of best health!
4. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

MONTH: _____							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	

_____ Number of days this month I protected my back

_____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of aerobic physical activity



Other wellness projects completed this month:

Signature _____ Date _____