

TREAT YOUR BACK PAIN FOR GOOD

DISCOVER THE SECRETS IN PLAIN SIGHT TO
BANISH YOUR CHRONIC BACK PAIN

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Also by Andre Panagos

Your Back Pain

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Introduction

I have discovered, as many physicians who treat chronic back pain eventually do, that persistent and unrelenting chronic back pain is the result of a series of overlooked causes by the physician or poor choices and habits by the patient. I am often reminded of these as I review the stories of patients who have suffered from years of chronic back pain. I have seen patients whose lives have been turned upside down by their chronic back pain, such as athletes who leave their beloved sport and parents who cannot pick up their young children. Not all chronic back pain will be cured by physical therapy, medications such as corticosteroids, injections or surgery but some try repeatedly with disastrous results.

Success is achievable with a humble and proactive patient-physician relationship, realistic goal setting and most importantly, follow through. I would not have believed this when I started seeing patients, but I have witnessed surprising success stories many times over using these three simple criteria. I am very proud to have helped people resolve their chronic back pain after decades of suffering and to have figured out ways to get people off of permanent disability when they were ready. I think you too can also succeed, but it is the equivalent of climbing Mount Everest. It will be one of the most important challenges you ever face but if you are careful and methodical, you will succeed.

The book is set up in a question answer format and is based on the many questions I have answered over the years about the causes of chronic back pain. The purpose of this book is allow you to get a glimpse into many my patient's thinking to see if there is

something you may have overlooked when trying to figure out how to banish your chronic back pain. Remember, you were not placed on this earth to take medicine and do physical therapy forever after a certain age because of chronic back pain. Let's see what we can figure out together.

The Perpetual Causes Of Persistent Back Pain

Why is back pain such a medical challenge?

Back pain is a very difficult condition to treat because a doctor's history and physical examination skills cannot, in some cases, fully identify the cause of the pain. When this is the case we rely on other tests such as imaging or nerve tests, but unfortunately these tests cannot assess all pain complaints. The tests we use are better at ruling out severe problems like large disc herniations, tumors, masses and fractures than ruling in the diagnosis. Often I have patients who receive MRI results that are negative for any underlying problems and they become very frustrated. Once I mention that the resolution of the imaging studies is not perfect, similar to a black and white picture of the real world, a sudden calm settles on their faces. All doctors understand that pain is real, but in many cases it can be nearly impossible to identify. People who have pain that is not identifiable often spend a great deal of time, money and effort trying to find the cause and a solution to their problem. If you do not try to continue to pursue a solution you may never find one. I have been very fortunate to treat patients who have had pain for years, even decades using new techniques such as platelet-rich plasma therapy, subcutaneous perineural injection series and ultrasound-guided procedures. I know it is possible to resolve your medical challenges; your goal is to find the right doctor or specialist for your case.

I have had back pain for many years. What is it due to?

If you have had back pain for many years there is a very low chance of a cancer or a recent fracture. It is most likely due to myofascial pain, disc degeneration, herniated disc(s), arthritis, scoliosis, fibromyalgia or a chronic fracture. It may also be exacerbated by chronic anxiety or depression.

What may cause recurring back pain?

Recurring back pain is most likely due to disc degeneration, herniated disc(s), arthritis, scoliosis, fibromyalgia, anxiety or depression. Recurring back pain also suggests that there may be modifiable factors that you can change such as improving your poor posture, or working to decrease your weakness or stiffness via strengthening and flexibility exercises, respectively.

What causes upper back pain?

Upper back pain is caused by several conditions. What makes the upper back unique are the shoulder blades that hang by muscles from your rib cage which adds an additional layer of complexity and the fine motor control required to support your head and neck. Upper back pain is most commonly caused by myofascial pain which is a result of local nerve irritation due to poor posture or from the constant strain on weak shoulder girdle muscles. It can also be caused by costovertebral joint arthritis, herniated discs, bony compression fractures, scoliosis or an S-shaped curve as well as kyphosis which is a fixed forward hunch; which if severe is called Scheuermann's disease.

What causes middle back pain?

Middle back pain usually develops from either an injury or prolonged slouching while sitting or standing. Injuries may include a compression fracture of the vertebral bodies or a fracture of the spinous process which is the portion of bone that you can feel when you touch your back. Symptoms related to poor posture are more insidious and develop over a long period of time. It originally starts with muscle overuse causing a muscle strain or injury to the ligaments and discs. This is followed by increasing muscle stiffness and ligament stretching. Over time you develop a condition called myofascial pain which describes constant muscle spasm in the area that does not resolve, even with massage. In patients with significant scoliosis, it develops most commonly in the peak of the scoliotic curve. In rare cases it is caused by a disc herniation in your neck which usually radiates to your shoulder or a disc herniation in your thoracic spine (rare) which can radiate around your chest to the front. Thoracic spine disc herniations are rare because this is the segment of your spine to which the rib cage attaches, thus limiting the extent of segmental motion and essentially protecting the discs from wear and tear. If the pain radiates up and down it is most likely myofascial pain, so start by improving your posture. If the pain has been going on for a long time, you should see your doctor for an evaluation and a possible subcutaneous perineural injection series.

Why do I have burning in my chest with middle back pain?

Burning in your chest associated with middle back pain can be caused by a heart attack. It may be combined with an uncomfortable pressure, burning or tightness in the center of your chest. It can also be accompanied with shortness of breath, weakness in your arms or pain or other uncomfortable sensations in your neck, jaw or stomach. It is important that you see your

doctor right away or go to your nearest emergency room for a full evaluation.

What problems can back pain cause?

Back pain can cause a multitude of problems which include the inability to sit, stand, walk, accomplish normal daily tasks and limit recreational activities. More disruptive problems can be the loss of your job, restlessness, loneliness, poor sleep, isolation, anxiety and depression. In very rare cases, people can become addicted to their pain medications and in the worst cases overdose on their pain medications and die. There have also been some reports of patients who have committed suicide because they could not get adequate pain relief. So you can understand how if not treated appropriately or within a reasonable period of time it can completely take over your life. I have had several patients tell me how horrible their lives had become and how they were a shadow of their former selves. On the other hand, I have also seen several of my patients rise like a phoenix from the darkness of their horrendous pain and find relief and a new and better life, new jobs for more money, new or better personal relationships and success that they never thought would come to them. So if you have back pain, stay a fighter and do not give up.

Is sciatica pain different from back pain?

Yes, sciatica describes pain that radiates down your buttock, posterior thigh and calf and is usually described as a sharp electrical bolt of lightning. Back pain is usually a deep or sharp ache across the lower part of your back. If you have sciatica pain, it usually means the problem is worse and is most often associated with a disc herniation compared with low back pain. Usually as the pain resolves the sciatica regresses first followed by the back pain.

How do I know if I have arthritis or if it's just back pain?

Arthritis pain is worse in the lower back when you extend your back backwards or arise from a chair after sitting for long period of time. It is also worse when you awaken in the morning and then settles down after one to two hours.

Why do I have bulging discs and sciatica without back pain?

The pain you experience from a bulging disc depends on a complex interplay of events, all of which we still do not fully understand. Essentially, a disc herniation results in an inflammatory response that you experience as back pain. If the bulging discs or inflammatory response contacts the descending nerve roots, most commonly the L4, L5, S1 nerve roots, you will develop low back pain with sciatica. This happens because the nerves that connect to the muscles in your leg also connect to the small muscles in your back. The position of the disc herniation and nerve will determine if you only have low back pain or only sciatica or both.

Are back and leg pain related to one another?

Back and leg pain may or may not be related to one another. There is a large list of possible causes for only back pain and only leg pain as well as for the combination of back pain with leg pain. If you are concerned you should see your doctor as soon as possible.

Can two herniated discs be the cause of my back pain?

One or more herniated discs can cause back pain. The challenge is in identifying the specific herniated disc(s) causing your pain. In rare cases, more than one disc can be involved. Surgeons looking to identify the correct disc herniation to address operatively will first order a discogram study. A discogram study is a test that uses either pressure to irritate the suspected disc or anesthetic to numb the suspected disc and it is compared with an adjacent normal disc. If your exact symptoms are reproduced or resolved respectively, then it is a positive test which will allow the surgeon to proceed with targeted surgery. If the exact disc cannot be identified then the surgery does not proceed and an alternate treatment plan is decided upon.

Should I be worried for the future if I have bulging discs with no back pain?

Bulging discs are part of the normal aging process and begin to appear at 35 years of age. They are universal after the age of 60. Several MRI studies have been done on healthy people without back pain and luckily even after 7 years; there is no correlation with disc bulges and the development of back pain. Some doctors believe that the worse the MRI findings, the greater your risk of back pain, and clinically, I would tend to agree.

What causes tailbone pain?

Tailbone pain, also known as coccydynia, is often due to local trauma following a fall onto the tailbone. This can cause a muscle spasm, ligament sprain, or misalignment or fracture of the bones. The coccyx can also be damaged during childbirth as the baby's head passes across the coccyx.

Is it unusual for children and teenagers to get back pain?

No, it is not unusual for children and teenagers to get back pain. Teenagers have a greater risk of back pain compared to a child due to participation in extreme sports, poor posture, backpack overload as well as scoliosis in the setting of rapid bone growth, poor self-esteem and surprisingly, limited physical activity. This is in contrast to younger children who are not surrounded by as much social pressure to continue the exacerbating physical activity. As a result, they tend to cease participation in the activities that cause pain allowing their back to heal. Teenagers on the other hand attempt to push the envelope and tend to be more aggressive due to their attitude or peer pressure.

How many young people suffer from back pain?

Research has reported that up to 80% of children and adolescents report back pain, which is similar to the percentage in adults.

My teenager has back pain, should I be extremely worried?

No, you should not be extremely worried. You should first allow the pain to improve with simple rest and discontinuation of any activities that exacerbate the pain. If the pain, however, is severe and impacting their daily activities including school or continues to be persistent despite rest it is important to see a doctor to rule out other, more dangerous causes.

What are common causes of back pain in women?

The common causes of back pain in women can be the same as in men with the addition of back pain associated with fashion such as high heeled shoes, compression garments and flip flops. Also large breasts, ovarian cysts, endometriosis, fibroids and menstrual changes are common causes of back pain in women.

As I get older can my back pain become debilitating?

It most certainly can, and the more debilitating it becomes, the greater it feeds into a vicious cycle promoting further chronic back pain, isolation and depression. The pain can become so debilitating that you may be confined, at first, to walking shorter distances, then as it progresses, to a walker or worse, a wheelchair. I have a hard time convincing my patients to use a cane or walker, but when they begin to have more falls, they are disappointed and reach for the cane or walker to keep themselves from being homebound. Decreased activity promotes more muscle loss, a more sedentary lifestyle which can worsen back problems further. Interestingly, a study from Italy suggests that you may have a great reduction in back pain after the age of 90 presumably because you expect to be less active or you tend to forget about your back pain. I would caution you not to look into the results as a possible golden time if you live into your 90s, as in Italy, older people are much more active in their community.

Do taxi drivers get back pain?

Taxi drivers can get back pain due to a variety of reasons. These include sitting in a confined space, vibration, stress, poor seat

ergonomics, prolonged driving; even from violence, smoking and job dissatisfaction.

Back Pain Is Not Always Benign

Could back pain mean hemorrhage?

In very rare cases, back pain may be caused by a hemorrhage. A hemorrhage occurs when blood flows outside of the blood vessels and into a specific area. The red blood cells that give blood its red color are very inflammatory which can cause muscle spasm and pain. A hemorrhage can be caused by a number of different problems which include hematoma from injury or an aneurysm, digestive tract bleeding and miscarriages. I have had several patients, young and old, who have had hemorrhages as a result of taking too many over-the-counter pain medications for their back pain and in one case, the patient collapsed at the front door of the emergency room. Another case that comes to mind is that of an older patient who was taking a blood thinning medication warfarin (Coumadin®). The patient started bleeding spontaneously in a muscle in their back and noticed a swelling that was growing larger by the hour. In this case, their back pain was due to a hemorrhage. Once the bleeding stopped, their back pain resolved. There are a large number of reasons that hemorrhage can occur so it is important to see your doctor right away if you are concerned.

Can back pain come from having a total knee replacement?

Once you have had a successful knee replacement your joint will feel much better and you will be ready to run around again. I am

sure you will be very excited to return to pain-free strolls in the park but beware, as this will also place an additional strain in your hip joint, sacroiliac joint and lower back, all of which are connected as part of a biokinetic chain. This is especially true if you limited your walking prior to your knee replacement surgery. When you are not moving, your muscles get stiff and weaker and the hip and small joints in the spine also stiffen up. When your joint is replaced, there is a sudden strain in your hip joint, sacroiliac joint and the multiple joints in your back, so it is important to engage in post knee replacement physical therapy slowly and with a trained physical therapist. If you have pre-existing problems in the hip joint, sacroiliac joint or multiple joints in the back you may also develop pain. I have had several patients develop sciatica following successful knee replacements which then needed to be treated.

Can back pain be caused by Lyme's disease?

Although rare, Lyme's disease has been reported to be a cause of back pain. Unfortunately this is not often detected during the initial visit unless the patient or the doctor is looking for this diagnosis. Lyme's disease is usually diagnosed after the patient fails the usual treatments which include physical therapy, medications and epidural steroid injections. The patients I have seen with Lyme's disease are often extremely frustrated due to their lack of improvement after several courses of treatment. The proper treatment for back pain due to Lyme's disease is a course of antibiotics over several months which is very different compared with usual back pain treatments. Over time patients report resolution of their back pain which confirms the correct diagnosis.

Is back pain a symptom of ALS?

Back pain can be due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). The typical symptoms can include muscle cramping and joint pains which are difficult to differentiate from other causes of back pain.

Are liver lesions related to back pain?

There are a number of liver lesions that can cause back pain. The most common liver lesions that cause back pain are bile duct cysts. Other liver lesions include hemangiomas, focal nodular hyperplasia, adenoma, nodular regenerative hyperplasia, focal fatty change or simple cysts and abscesses. Of course it is also important to remember that cancers that have metastasized from other parts of the body to the liver can also cause back pain. These include cancer of the breast, lung, stomach, pancreas, esophagus and even the skin (melanoma).

Does chemotherapy lead to back pain?

Chemotherapy can lead to back pain but it depends on the type and dose of chemotherapy you receive. Different chemotherapy agents have also been known to cause joint pain, bone pain, muscle pain as well as osteoporosis.

Does radiation therapy lead to back pain?

Radiation therapy focused on the spine can cause back pain. Radiation therapy may result in nerve damage or sudden osteoporosis and a fracture depending on the dose and the structure that needs to be targeted. Many radiation oncologists take all of the structures into account and work very hard to minimize damage but sometimes it is unavoidable. In many cases, the pain may also begin many years or decades after the treatment. This is due to the long term toxic radiation effects on the cells which include severe osteoporosis, fibrosis or general stiffness of

the tissues, and nerve damage. In severe cases it can result in very severe nerve damage resulting in excruciating nerve pain or spinal cord injury.

Is there a connection between Accutane and back pain?

Yes, side effects reported by people taking isotretinoin (Accutane®) include back pain as well as muscle and joint pain. If you think there's a connection you should see your doctor right away.

How can I tell if my back pain is due to my gallbladder?

Gallbladder pain typically spreads in a characteristic fashion to your right upper back or shoulder blade area. The pain usually worsens with fatty meals, which allows you to differentiate gallbladder pain from other types of back pain. Other symptoms of gallbladder disease include abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting.

Do statin drugs cause back pain?

One in ten people complain of muscle aches and pains while taking statin drugs such as atorvastatin (Lipitor®), pravastatin (Pravachol®), and simvastatin (Zocor®). The symptoms often improve on decreasing or discontinuing the statin drug. In rare cases, inflammation of the muscle called myositis can develop which can result in muscle tenderness and fever or worse, rhabdomyolysis, which can lead to muscle breakdown and kidney failure.

Can persistent foot pain be connected to my back pain?

Persistent foot pain may be caused by the same problem that is causing your back pain. It may be due to a nerve that connects to a part of your foot, such as the L4, L5 and S1 nerve roots. Your foot pain may also be due to a local foot problem; the most common are plantar fasciitis (heel pain), tendinitis (ankle or pain on the top of the foot), a Morton's neuroma (pain between the toes), arthritis of the many joints within the foot, or a fracture. Please see your doctor if you have any concerns.

Can chronic knee pain that has not improved after local knee treatments be coming from my back?

The L3 and S1 nerve roots from the spine connect to the front and back of your knee, respectively. The L3 nerve root is much more likely to cause knee pain after the S1 nerve root. If knee imaging and local knee treatments have not been successful then you should consider an MRI of the lumbar spine to evaluate for disc herniations affecting the L3 nerve root (L3-4 disc level) or S1 nerve root (L5-S1 disc level). If there is a disc herniation that correlates, you may consider getting a nerve block to anesthetize or numb the nerve to see if your pain resolves.

Does diverticulitis cause back pain?

Diverticulitis can cause back pain. It is a very common condition that is found in more than half of all Americans over the age of 60. It is caused by constipation from a low fiber diet. The extra straining required to pass stool during a bowel movement causes increased intestinal pressure. Increasing intestinal pressure causes

the formation of intestinal pouches. If a small piece of stool, a seed or food becomes trapped within one of these pouches, an infection or inflammation develops which can cause fevers, chills, nausea, vomiting, bloating or cramping.

Can constipation cause back pain?

Constipation occurs when the gastrointestinal system becomes obstructed. Although your bowel movements are halted, waste continues to be produced creating greater and greater upstream pressure. This pressure begins to stretch the bowels which can worsen your pain. Straining on the toilet due to constipation can also result in increased bowel pressure which may be associated with increased pain as well. You should see your doctor for medications to treat your constipation, especially if you take opioid pain medications which can cause very severe constipation. Common medications used to treat constipation include docusate sodium (Colace®), polyethylene glycol (Miralax®) and magnesium.

Can back pain indicate ovulation?

Back pain associated with ovulation can be a mild or stabbing pain that is often accompanied with other signs of ovulation such as sore breasts, abdominal pain, higher temperature and changes in the mucous or lining of the cervix.

What does back pain due to a fibroid feel like?

Up to 75% of women with fibroids do not have back pain. Development of back pain depends on the size and the position of the fibroid. Very large fibroids that push on sensitive pelvic structures can cause lower back pain as well as pelvic and thigh pain.

Can flatulence cause back pain?

The time available to eat, the size of the portion and the thoroughness of chewing your food have a profound effect on flatulence. Flatulence is caused by the breakdown of undigested food products such as lactose (milk sugar), fructose (fruit sugar) and starches (bread) by the many bacteria within your intestines. If the pressure of the flatulence is high enough to stretch your bowels, you will experience stomach cramping and back pain. Tips to decrease flatulence include giving yourself adequate time to eat, taking small bites, chewing your food until it is of a liquid consistency, swallowing slowly and waiting until this entire process is complete before your next bite.

Do hemorrhoids cause back pain?

Hemorrhoids can cause local rectal pain but are not known to cause low back pain. Hemorrhoids can mimic coccyx pain due to the location of the pain but coccyx pain does not cause bleeding as hemorrhoids do.

What causes back pain and nausea?

Nausea is a common side effect of many medications used to manage symptoms of back pain. These medications include anti-inflammatory medications, muscle relaxants and opioid pain medications. Nausea associated with back pain can also be due to the pain itself or other factors including internal tissue damage, cancer, stress, menstruation and pregnancy.

Can gastrointestinal problems create back pain?

Several gastrointestinal problems can cause back pain. These include irritable bowel syndrome, peptic ulcer disease, pancreatitis and diverticulitis. Back pain associated with weight loss is a clue that your gastrointestinal system may be contributing to the problem.

What can cause back pain and frequent urination?

Back pain with frequent urination can be caused by a urinary tract infection and can be associated with fever, chills, and nausea. Other possible causes include pregnancy, prostatitis, kidney stones, cancers, and ovarian cysts so it is important to see your doctor right away to be evaluated.

Can back pain continue after passing a kidney stone?

It is not uncommon to have residual and lingering back pain after a kidney stone has passed. An additional stone may have been missed on the CT scan or there may be another cause of your pain such as a congenital obstruction of the ureter, a blood clot or scar tissue.

Should I be concerned if I have vaginal discharge and back pain?

If you have vaginal discharge associated with back pain you should see your doctor to rule out a number of different possible causes which include a urinary tract infection, urethritis or infection of the urethra, pelvic inflammatory disease, cervical cancer, pregnancy or Reiter's syndrome which is a form of arthritis.

What causes lower abdominal pain and back pain?

There are several causes of lower abdominal pain and back pain. It can be due to a ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysm that is also associated with a pulsating sensation around the lower abdomen. It can also be due to an ectopic pregnancy which is associated with vaginal bleeding and dizziness; as well as pelvic inflammatory disease which is associated with vaginal discharge, chills, diarrhea, nausea, and pain during urination or sex.

What are the most common causes of back pain during pregnancy?

The most common causes of back pain during pregnancy are due to weight gain, hormonal changes and physical changes that allow you to carry and deliver your baby safely.

Weight gain in the abdomen causes increased pressure on the structures in your lower back as they work harder and harder with each passing month to keep your belly supported. This places an incredible strain on the ligaments, discs and facet joints in your spine. General weight gain also places greater pressure on your back and your spine needs to support increasing weight not only in your belly but your breasts, hips and thighs.

Relaxin. Among several hormones that are active during pregnancy, a hormone called relaxin is released to loosen the ligaments surrounding the pelvis; this allows it to expand, so your baby's head will pass through the pelvis safely during delivery. Unfortunately, relaxin also relaxes the ligaments in the sacroiliac joint and spine which can cause instability and greater pain during and after pregnancy. It often takes about one year for the effects of the hormone, relaxin, to fully dissipate. Sometimes the pelvis does

not return to its prior precise configuration which can result in chronic pain.

Rectus abdominis muscles. The rectus abdominis muscles separate to accommodate your expanding belly which temporarily limits their ability to act as core stabilizing muscles. This adds additional pressure on the remaining core stabilizing muscles.

Will I have a lot of back pain after a cesarean section?

You may have a good deal of back pain after a cesarean section from the stretching of the incisional scar tissue. It may also cause irritable bowel syndrome, as well, which may be associated with back pain.

Your Choices Fuel The Raging Fire Of Unrelenting Back Pain

Can mopping cause back pain?

Mopping can cause back pain so it is important to keep a couple of things in mind. While mopping you should keep your back straight and only fill the bucket half full so you do not have to repetitively move a heavy object around the floor. Use a sponge mop to decrease the weight that you swing back and forth compared to a fabric mop. Remember to lift the bucket correctly by using your knees while keeping your back straight and finally, mop small sections of the floor at a time.

How can foot problems result in back pain?

Excess pronation or the rolling out of your foot can put excess strain along the kinetic chain of your ankles, knees, hips and back in an ascending fashion. It can alter your walking style and lead to premature wear and tear in other joint areas such as the knees and hips. It is usually due to flat feet or what doctors call pes planus. When you have flat feet, your knees rotate towards each other, decreasing the flexibility of your hips. Now with your hips stiffer, your back has to work harder when moving forwards and backwards and just like a paper clip once you have bent it enough times it will break, in the back this begins as disc degeneration then a disc herniation and eventually you develop arthritis.

Do shoes such as high heels or flip flops cause back pain?

Absolutely yes! High heel shoes raise your heels off the ground and cause your body to lean forward. To remain upright, your body compensates by leaning backward to maintain your upright posture, which then places a great strain on the discs and joints in the back. Your balance becomes precarious on the thin little heels and makes your core muscles work harder to keep you from falling over, especially if you walk on uneven surfaces. I recommend that if you need to have high heel shoes for an event, make sure you look good in them, walk short distances, and take them off as soon as possible. Flip flops make you crunch your toes up tight in order to keep your flip flops on your feet. They also cause you to take shorter strides which alters your gait. Over months to years, this can create additional strains up the kinetic chain to the knee, hip and lower back. I recommend that you only wear flip flops around the house or at the pool, not in town or during long walks.

Why do I have back pain every time I do squats?

Squats can be very demanding on the upper and lower back and need to be done with proper weight and precise form. Possible causes of back pain can include rounding or overarching of your back, a forward lean, or uneven back loading while lifting. It is important to work with your trainer or coach to make sure that you are doing squats with precise form otherwise you may suffer a devastating injury.

Are weak abdominal muscles a cause of my back pain?

Yes, they are a very important part of treating your back pain. This is the reason why patients are sent to physical therapy and/or are recommended to do Pilates at the first sign of back pain. Having six pack abs (rectus abdominis muscles) will not prevent you from having back pain. You need to train the other muscles that surround your back as well. These muscles include the internal and external obliques, transversus abdominis, and erector spinae. You also need to remember the diaphragm on top and the pelvic floor muscles on the bottom. All of these muscles pressurize the abdominal cavity and work as an internal back brace. Think of this internal back brace as a balloon that you squeeze together. The harder you squeeze the balloon, the more the balloon pushes back. If your muscles have a very strong squeeze, you can lift hundreds of pounds which is a lot more than the 20 pounds that research has shown your spine can support. If any of these muscles are weak or not coordinated, your internal back brace fails causing you to use your spine to support your upper body. This then places severe pressure on the discs and joints that make up your back and with the passage of time, you will begin to develop back pain.

Does standing all day make my back pain worse?

Standing all day can make your back worse because it places a lot of force across the discs and the facet joints in your spine for a long period of time. Also the muscles in your back and pelvis can begin to fatigue and your legs may begin to swell with fluid. These changes can increase your risk of getting injured. Over many years, as little as five minutes of standing can cause severe pain due to disc degeneration, disc herniations and arthritis. This can be especially challenging for security guards, hairdressers, chefs and police officers. Prolonged standing can be as bad as prolonged sitting, so the goal is not to stand or sit all day but to move often throughout

the day to decrease the massive forces that squeeze your spinal discs and facet joints. Standing uses about 25% more energy than sitting, allowing you to lose weight with little extra effort. While standing, you are more likely to move around than while sitting so it is preferable to stand most of the day, moving frequently and to sit for meetings, lunch or other activities.

Can too much beer cause severe back pain?

Having one too many beers has not been found to have a direct cause of back pain. However, if you drink a lot of beer over a long period of time, you may develop back pain from weight gain, overall increased inflammation in your body, alcohol-related liver disease, as well as from falls due to intoxication.

Do compression garments (Spanx[®]) cause back pain?

I am asked this quite regularly. Spanx[®] are used by women as a very compressive girdle. They have been reported to cause numbness and tingling in the legs as well as worsening of pre-existing muscle spasms. In some cases the compression can improve muscle spasms depending on the type of garment you are wearing. The best rule of thumb to use is: if it hurts, you should not wear it. If you are a slave to fashion then I will be silent, as I have gotten into trouble in the past trying to discuss fashion with my female patients.

What are possible causes of back pain during orgasm?

During orgasm there is a reflexive tightening of the pelvic muscles and upstream lower back muscles which may exacerbate back pain or cause additional muscle spasms.

Could my breasts be the cause of my back pain?

Large breasts can be a cause of upper back pain. Excess weight in the chest tends to fatigue the back muscles, resulting in poor posture, which creates a chain reaction or worsening posture and fatigue. Size D breasts and above have also been shown to cause upper back pain by altering the normal spinal curvature. Things that you can do prior to considering breast reduction surgery include using a customized supportive sports bra, exercise and a trial of physical therapy. This may be required by your insurance carrier before they pre-authorize a breast reduction.

Can a butt augmentation help with back pain?

Adding fatty tissue to augment your butt will not help with back pain. What you need is more muscle to support your lower back and hips properly than extra fatty tissue.

Should I be worried if I develop sudden back pain after coughing?

Sudden, severe back pain after coughing is most likely due to a herniated disc. If the pain is not severe you may give it several days to see if it settles down and resolves. If the pain is severe it is important that you see your doctor right away. If you have been coughing for several days and the pain is slowly worsening it is most likely due to muscle fatigue which can last for a couple of weeks before resolving. In rare cases, you may develop a rib fracture that will take 4-6 weeks to improve.

Does the time of day that I have back pain mean anything?

If your pain is worse in the morning and settles down after several hours, it is often due to muscle spasm or arthritis pain. You could try a stretching routine before you get out of bed or take medication prior to bedtime to help with the morning pain. If your back pain is worse in the afternoon, it is most likely due to poor posture, so make sure you review your desk setup at work. If your pain is worse at night, you may have overdone it during the day and without distractions you are more aware of the pain while lying in bed trying to fall asleep. If you have a fever or chills that are associated with your back pain, you may have cancer or an infection, so it is important that you see your doctor right away.

Why does my back hurt when the weather is colder?

Disc degeneration, disc herniations and arthritis often are associated with muscle spasms, and tend to muscles stiffen and spasm in colder weather. If the weather is too cold, you should stay inside until the temperature rises. If you have to go outside, you should dress accordingly and stretch before any cold weather recreational activity to prevent muscle spasms.

Can weather influence the severity of my back pain?

A decrease in barometric pressure (the weight of the atmosphere that surrounds all of us) causes your tissues to expand. This also activates certain pain fibers that are sensitive to stretch. If they are already sensitized due to an underlying disc herniation or arthritis, they are more likely to send a pain signal to your brain. Some people may also be more sensitive to changes in temperature and

humidity which also alter the density of the surrounding atmosphere activating pain fibers.

Why do I only have back pain in the summer?

Summertime activities can exacerbate back pain. These activities include long car and airplane trips and more frequent sports or recreational activities. You are more likely to carry, lift and bend while working in your yard or garden or carry a heavy golf bag during a day of golf with your friends. Walking in flip-flops changes your normal walking pattern which can overload your back as well. If you have summer time back pain, you should stay in excellent shape the remaining months of the year in preparation for summertime fun.

Why do I have sharp back pain when bending forward and backwards?

If you develop sharp back pain when you bend forward and backwards it can be due to disc degeneration or facet joint arthritis, respectively. When you bend forward you pressurize your disc which can cause pain. When you bend backwards, you compress the arthritic facet joints which also causes pain. You should try a stretching program that you can find in later chapters in this book to see if this helps decrease your pain.

Why do I have sharp back pain when I stand up after sitting for a while?

Sitting for a long time can result in tightness of the hip flexor muscles, called the iliopsoas muscles. These muscles begin in the lower spine and hip bone and attach to the femur bone which is located in your thigh. When you arise from a chair, you stretch the iliopsoas muscle and if they are tight, you pull your spine forward

which can be painful. It is important to keep your iliopsoas muscles flexible with frequent standing breaks or a hip extension stretching program. Arthritis of the facet joints can also cause pain with straightening up from a sitting position because the facet joints become compressed when you stand up. Their main function is to keep your spinal column aligned but as the discs degenerate and shrink, the facet joints start supporting more of your weight and become arthritic; hence they are more sensitive to movement and pressure.

What causes sudden chest and back pain when sneezing?

If you have sudden chest and back pain with sneezing you should see your doctor right away to rule out an acute aortic dissection. An aortic dissection describes a tear in the major blood vessel that carries blood from your heart to the majority of your body. This is a medical emergency that needs to be treated immediately.

Why do I have back pain when I breathe in?

If you have back pain when you breathe in it may indicate a rib fracture if you had a recent trauma or injury. It may also be the result of severe scoliosis or curvature of the spine.

Why does my stomach and back hurt after eating or drinking?

If you have sudden pain in the abdomen and back after eating or drinking you may have a gallbladder or pancreas problem. Gallbladder pain occurs most often following a greasy or fatty meal. Gallbladder pain may also be associated with pancreatitis, which can be a medical emergency so it is important to see your doctor right away for evaluation. Crohn's disease, which is a

chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract, periodically flares up and can also cause back pain.

Why would I have back pain after sleeping on my stomach?

If you have a history of back pain or arthritis in the back and sleep on your stomach, especially in a soft bed, it can put extra pressure on the joints in the back resulting in severe tightness and stiffness. You'd be better off sleeping on your side or your back.

Why does my back pain limit my ability to turn in bed?

Back pain is often associated with muscle spasm or muscle inflammation which greatly limits flexibility and diminishes strength. If you have neither flexibility nor strength you will not be able to turn in bed. If twisting also results in pain your ability to turn in bed will also be very limited.

Why does sleeping on my back result in back pain?

Your back pain may be increased due to a much too firm mattress, a soft mattress that results in a sinking effect, or muscle spasms.

Is it safe to have sex while I have back pain?

Yes, it is safe to have sex if you have back pain. You should consider starting with a gentle massage to relax your muscles. Also consider using pillows for support. You should try different positions that do not put a great deal of force across your back. Also consider taking a passive role or using a side lying position; try lying off the edge of the bed for support or using a chair. If you are active, try to

limit your pelvic movement as I have seen a number of patients who have reported significant lower back exacerbations after too many pelvic thrusts. Finally, it is important to communicate to make sure no one gets injured during sex.

Could you tell me what leads to lower back pain while running?

Running can place a great deal of stress on your lower back if not done properly. Simple ideas to limit your back pain include stretching and warming up before and after your run and running on a soft surface. Make sure your shoes are supportive and use an extra arch support if you have high arches. Remember to strike the ground using your midfoot and do not land on your heels. Posture remains important while running, so do not slouch forward. Remember, do not thump down like a rock; instead tread lightly like a gazelle.

Does back pain come from being overweight?

One of my most effective treatments for back pain is weight loss. Although it may not completely resolve your back pain it can be very helpful in reducing the severity of your pain. Carrying even a few extra pounds places an extra load on your discs, which increases your risk of degenerative disc disease as well as exaggerating the natural curve of your back. Also, fat cells produce inflammatory chemicals, that promote the breakdown of your tissues and discs as well as increase your sensitivity to pain.

If I gain weight, will I have back and hip pain?

You have a greater risk of back and hip pain if you gain weight, especially if you have some degree of arthritis. Not all severely overweight individuals have back and hip pain.

I have occasional back pain, is it safe to play tennis?

If you have occasional back pain that doesn't get worse during or after playing tennis than it is probably okay to continue participating in the sport. Unfortunately the wear and tear on the spine that is required to develop a winning swing greatly increases your chance of arthritis and research has shown that professional tennis players have a greater amount of arthritis in their spine compared with people who do not play tennis.

Can slouching lead to back pain?

Common sense suggests slouching due to bad habits, poor self-esteem or lack of physical fitness can lead to back pain. The pain may originate from disc degeneration or disc herniations and chronic muscle or fascial inflammation. Unfortunately very little research has been done to assess the progression of slouching to back pain.

The Secrets In Plain Sight To Banish Persistent Back Pain

Why must localized back pain be treated before treating generalized referred back pain?

Localized back pain can often be the source not only of your pinpoint pain but also of generalized referred pain into your arm or leg as well. Referred pain describes pain that radiates away from the source of pain along nerve, muscle, bone or fascial pathways. In many cases, once the localized pain is successfully treated, generalized radiating pain can also dissipate. We often see the phenomena of centralization, which describes the pain complaint getting smaller and smaller with resolution of referred pain. This usually indicates that the underlying problem is being treated effectively. If the local pinpoint pain resolves but the referred pain does not, then that pain needs to be targeted for treatment as well.

I have a sore back with pain in both legs, what can I do for relief?

A sore back with pain in both legs may be a sign of stiffness or spinal stenosis. Conservative treatments include stretching and core stabilization exercises. If you have no relief, your doctor may order imaging and once reviewed to rule out severe pathology such as tumors, masses or fractures, may consider subcutaneous perineural injections or epidural steroid injections. In some cases, I

have found patients with a sore back and leg pain to respond very well to magnesium supplementation even without the above injections; since it is a low risk treatment, it is worth a try.

What should I do if I have persistent back pain?

If you have a persistent back pain the most important thing that you can do is focus on the most common causes of back pain: poor posture and prolonged sitting. Focus on your posture, which may be as simple as remembering to keep your ears over your shoulders. Limit your sitting burden by using a standing desk or arise from your chair for 5 minutes every hour using a timer. These simple ideas are cost-effective and are not time consuming. Other things that are important to remember include focusing on core and pelvic girdle strengthening as well as hamstring stretching. You should also consider having your vitamin D level checked as it has been found to correlate with persistent back pain. If none of these simple tricks are helpful you should consult with your doctor to get a specific diagnosis and treatment plan.

I have back pain in the center of my back. How do I stop it from hurting?

Back pain in the center of your back is often due to poor posture. Simple things that you can do to decrease pain include improving your sitting or standing posture by remembering to sit or stand up straight and keep your ears over your shoulders. Frequent rest breaks of approximately 5 minutes every hour can also be helpful, walk around, or even lie down to completely relax your back muscles. Unfortunately this is hard in the workplace, but if you can lie down in an empty conference room it can make a big difference. Also, make sure you have a proper chair and desk that is

fit for your stature. Remember to keep your shoulders down, support your elbows on your desk or chair and relax while working at your task or computer. It is also important to stretch your chest muscles to counter the effects of prolonged slouching. Finally, it is vitally important to strengthen your posterior shoulder muscles to support your neck and shoulders as well as to keep your head upright. A less common cause of pain in the center of your back can be a compression fracture, particularly in the older population with osteoporosis, which requires medical treatment. If none of these recommendations work, try an over-the-counter pain medication such as acetaminophen or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen or naproxen if you continue to have pain.

What should I do if I have back pain between the shoulder blades?

If you have pain between the shoulder blades that improves with shoulder retraction you could have myofascial pain. Treatment includes improved posture and strengthening of your posterior shoulder muscles as well as stretching of your anterior chest muscles. You may also require a massage, physical therapy, trigger point injections, or subcutaneous perineural injection series. You may also have compression of the dorsal scapular nerve that is next to the shoulder blade. It is difficult to assess this problem so it is important to see your physician who may need to do a dorsal scapular nerve hydrodissection.

What can I do for back pain and the urge to crack my back all the time?

Cracking your back has not been proven to cause damage to your spine or back pain. Chiropractors crack the back much more

aggressively to treat certain back conditions and call this manipulation; and use this as part of their overall treatment program. Often muscle stiffness or joint stiffness is temporarily or permanently improved with cracking which suggests you may need to re-evaluate your posture or move more often throughout the day. Chronic back pain may develop from spinal instability caused by excess chiropractic manipulation. This condition has been hotly debated between chiropractors and doctors for decades. Spinal instability happens when the ligaments that connect and stabilize the spinal bones and joints become very loose. If these ligaments become excessively loose, the effect is similar to a cheese grater grinding down the delicate cartilage within the joints and the gel within the discs.

Are there any couches or sofas that prevent back pain?

Sitting in a slouched position stretches the muscles, ligaments and discs in the back and also increases muscle strain and inflammation which results in micro injury and poor muscle feedback, as well as chronic muscle inflammation called myositis. It is important to avoid sitting too deeply in a soft sofa and make sure your feet touch the floor. You should not recline too far back without supporting your legs or sit with your head stooped forward. Zero-gravity style chairs firmly support your entire body from your head to your feet and recline by rotating backwards. These are the best chairs, if you need to sit for a long period of time.

Would a chair massage help soothe my back pain?

A chair massage may be very helpful for back pain but unfortunately it is most likely not going to fix the source of your

pain. If your pain is worsened with a chair massage it may suggest an underlying injury such as a disc herniation which may need to be treated.

What is the best sleeping posture if I sleep on a firm mattress?

If you sleep on a firm mattress your best sleeping positions are to sleep on your back with your arms by your sides using a pillow to prop up your legs or in a side fetal position with a pillow between your legs.

I have back pain when I'm on my bicycle. How do I prevent this?

If you are a frequent cyclist, the most important thing you can do is to make sure your bicycle is fitted to your frame. Also remember to maintain a flat back when riding and stretch before and after your ride.

How do I treat upper back pain in my ribs?

If you have upper back pain due to a fracture then the treatment of choice is rest, and pain medications as needed for up to eight to twelve weeks to let your fracture heal. If your upper back pain is due to a muscle spasm, then a focus on posture and/or a subcutaneous perineural injection series may be helpful to relax the muscle spasm. If a spinal nerve or an intercostal nerve is causing your upper back pain then a nerve block may be helpful.

Can the medications that I take for back pain also cause nausea?

Many medications can cause nausea including anti-inflammatory medications, muscle relaxants, and opioid pain medications. The most common medications that cause nausea are the opioid pain medications: codeine and morphine. It may take up to 7 days for the nausea to resolve. Often your doctor can lower the medication dosage to reduce your nausea just enough to allow continued pain control or switch you to an alternate pain medication. If neither strategy works, your doctor may also give you a medication that can help with the nausea such as ondansetron (Zofan[®]).

What can I do about my bad tailbone pain?

There are a number of different things that you can do to help alleviate tailbone pain. Simple measures include a well-padded seat cushion that takes the pressure off of the coccyx while sitting upright, frequent rest breaks to avoid prolonged sitting, and anti-inflammatory medications. If you do not have significant relief you can see your physical therapist for a massage of the levator ani surrounding the coccyx or see your doctor to rule out a joint or ligament problem.

How can I lose weight to help with my back pain?

One of the greatest misconceptions about losing weight is the amount of exercise needed. Although exercise is an important component of weight loss, the most important element in weight loss is limiting, as much as possible, your intake of sugar, flour and dairy products. These three components of the typical American diet overload your body's finely tuned glucose production and regulation system resulting in frequent bouts of hunger throughout the day. Of course with continued hunger, you will gain weight as you eat many more calories than you need during the day. Sugar, flour and dairy also increase stress and

inflammation within your body. The body responds by releasing a stress hormone called cortisol that also causes you to gain weight. Believe it or not, sugar is thought to be more addictive than cocaine or heroin.

Should I change my pillows if I have back pain?

When choosing a pillow, the choice usually comes down to preference and comfort as there is no one perfect pillow. It is important to choose a pillow that keeps your neck supported and aligned with your spine; to minimize pressure in your back muscles and intervertebral discs. If you are back sleeper you should consider a pillow with minimal loft to prevent your head from being flexed forward. You will want more loft in your pillow if you are side sleeper to keep your head aligned with your spine. Finally, if you are stomach sleeper you should choose a pillow with minimal loft to keep your head from extending backwards.

Is there anything I should do as a tall person to help back pain?

If you are tall, it is most important to work at a proper workstation, with a chair that is proper for your height. Also you should remember to maintain good posture as you are more likely to slouch and bend forward.

Is it better to use a treadmill or stationary bicycle for back pain?

The use of a treadmill or stationary bicycle depends on your preference. It is important to use the machine that causes the least amount of back pain. When using either a treadmill or stationary bicycle, you need to remember to keep your back straight without slouching and go at a steady pace.

Is it OK to go to spinning classes if I have back pain?

Spin classes can put a huge strain on your back leading to an exacerbation of your back pain depending on the intensity of your class, weights used and changes in position while spinning. If you find that your back is greatly exacerbated by spinning, you should consider decreasing the intensity of your classes or discontinuing the classes until your back pain has resolved.

What can be done for back pain from playing golf?

Warm up before your golf game and focus on smooth rhythmic motions during your practice swings. During your game, it is important to keep your knees slightly bent with your feet a shoulders-width apart. If the drive is causing the pain to get worse you may want to raise your heel or limit the force and distance of your drive. Also remember to carefully carry your golf bag or use a golf cart and if the pain does not change consider taking a break from golf.

What can I do for my chronic back pain during airline travel?

It is important to remember that airline seats are not made to be comfortable for average healthy people. If you are tall, large, or overweight you may have even more difficulty. In general, airline seats do not satisfy the minimal ergonomic standards for an appropriate seating surface but you are expected to sit and even sleep in an airline seat when traveling near and far. No wonder many airline passengers complain of back pain. Have you ever seen

how difficult it is for some people to get out of their seat after a long flight? Make sure you do not become one of those people.

There are many simple seating tricks you can use to manage your back pain while flying. Try using a pillow or blanket for lumbar support. Since airline seats do not support your thighs and tend to have minimal supportive cushioning, you should push your butt as far back into the seat as possible to support your thighs, but also to limit slouching. You can also try using a pillow or blanket underneath your thighs for extra support. Make sure you keep your feet in front of you to limit twisting in your chair; take frequent standing breaks, and distract yourself and your back pain with good reading material. Make sure you allow airline personnel to handle your baggage to the gate and ask for help from a stewardess or fellow passenger to place your luggage into the overhead bin. If your back pain is not too bad and you feel that you can place your luggage into the overhead bin, make sure you place your luggage in the seat in front of you and lift straight up into the overhead bin. Do not twist and lift. Twisting and lifting places a great deal of force on your spine and can result in a new back problem or exacerbate an existing back injury.

Remember to bring extra prescriptions for pain medications or muscle relaxants with you during your trip. Keep them in their prescription bottles as opioid medications are illegal without a prescription and you may be detained and questioned about their origin if they are loose in a bag.

You can also get a letter from your doctor to request special accommodations such as an aisle seat or upgrade as well as approval to lie on the floor during long flights.

Finally, remember to relax and enjoy the ride.

How can I prevent back pain in children and teenagers?

The most important thing you can do to prevent back pain in children and teenagers is to limit the amount of weight that is carried in their backpack. The recommended maximum weight that should be carried in a backpack by school-age children and teenagers is approximately 10% of their body weight. Other preventative ideas include using a rolling backpack or a smaller backpack with a hip strap to distribute part of the load from the spine to the hips, focus on proper posture especially when using mobile devices with their ever-growing popularity, as well as age-appropriate physical activity and sports participation with limits on pursuing extreme flexibility which is most profound at this age.

What is the best way of fixing back pain while pregnant?

There are limited medications available when pregnant but this does not mean there are not any options available to you.

Regular exercise. The most important way of fixing your back pain is to continue the regular exercise program you had prior to your pregnancy to maintain your muscle strength and aerobic conditioning. This may include walking, swimming, gentle weight training or use of a stationary exercise bicycle. As your pregnancy progresses, you will have less heart and lung capacity to support your workouts, as your baby will occupy more space and require more and more oxygenated blood, limiting what is available for your workouts. As a consequence, you will more easily become short of breath. This is not a good time to start an aggressive exercise program but it is important to maintain your normal physical activities. If you want to work out you should do it with a physical therapist that has experience with pregnancy.

Posture continues to be important when you're pregnant and it is very important to maintain proper and excellent posture not only while sitting but when standing and sleeping as well. When

sitting remember to use a rolled up towel to support your back while you keep your knees at a right angle. Also make sure your feet are firmly planted on the floor and if not, use a stool or books to find the proper height, as this also decreases the force on your spine. Finally, remember to sit with your ears over your shoulders and use an armrest to support your upper body weight. When standing remember to keep your shoulders and head back and if difficult, consider a maternity belly support belt to help support your growing baby. Of course, do not stand for long periods of time but if you have to, take frequent rest breaks. While standing, try to periodically, throughout the day, contract your abdominal muscles while flattening your back as you slightly bend your knees to take the pressure off your lower back. Sleep should be the most restful time of day. If you have difficulty sleeping make sure you are positioning yourself properly. While sleeping on your side, consider using a body pillow to support your breasts and belly. Also consider propping up your legs if you suffer from swollen legs.

Sacroiliac joint pain. As the hormone relaxin does its job to loosen the ligaments, the sacroiliac joint which is the joint between the lowest part of your spine and the hips also loosens. The sacroiliac joint is not a joint that moves like a knee joint, instead it normally moves very little, but as it can move more during pregnancy, it can get stuck or even become too loose. If it is stuck, simple physical therapy can be very helpful to dislodge it. If it is very unstable, a sacroiliac joint belt may be helpful or, in rare cases, you may be limited to bed rest for the remaining weeks of your pregnancy.

Medications. In rare cases, your obstetrician will allow you to take opioid or other pain medications based on the progress of your pregnancy. It is very important to discuss any medications that you may consider using first with your doctor.

Acupuncture. If your obstetrician is comfortable with it, you may also consider acupuncture from a practitioner who is

experienced with pregnancy as there are certain acupuncture points that should not be used with pregnancy.

Massage. A gentle massage may also be very helpful to relax your muscles and decrease your muscle tension.

What is the best way to reduce back pain in an older person?

The best way to reduce back pain as you get older boils down to four major factors: Keeping active with limited prolonged sitting, keeping your muscles strong, proper sleep, and a healthy diet.

Sitting. As you get older you tend to have more and more responsibilities, which means you are less active, you do not have as much time to exercise and you spend more time sitting. This chronic and increased cumulative sitting burden places more and more stress on your spine resulting in an accelerated degeneration of your intervertebral discs. Your body becomes fatigued with sitting and so the slouch begins. Older bodies become accustomed to a certain sitting (mostly slouching) position which you get into without much notice. Any slouch, side lean or leg crossing places a great deal of force across small areas of your spine. I met an older man who reported leaning to the left side of his desk for years which perfectly fit the type of severe left-sided spine arthritis I saw on his x-ray. When we discussed this he reported that he was not comfortable in any other position, so it was my job to change his sitting posture. Do not cross your legs, while sitting, as it places a great deal of force across your back as well as your hips.

Muscle versus body fat. Your metabolism slows down as you become more sedentary. This happens because you lose muscle mass, NOT because of your advancing age. It is hard to tell if you have lost muscle other than you may not feel as strong as you were when you were younger. In most cases, the muscle is replaced with fat so you may not look much different except that your skin may

sag a bit more. This process is most evident on spine MRIs. The beautiful muscle bands that are clearly seen to support the spine are replaced with disorganized fatty tissue, in some cases, almost the entire muscle mass in the spine is replaced with fat. I have some older patients who live to exercise and have exercised for so many years that their spine MRI does not demonstrate this phenomenon. On strength testing, they are much stronger than some of my younger patients, particularly my younger patients who are employed as very sedentary computer programmers or computer network engineers. This suggests that we are made to exercise much harder than we really do, so the disability that comes with aging is really only from not exercising more. In a sense it is like an exercise deficiency. Also as the fat replaces muscle, there is less muscle available to support our spine, increasing our risk of back pain. Research measuring strength gains in older patients (70-80 years old) demonstrate significant strength and muscle mass increases, so it is never too late to start exercising.

Sleep. As you get older, you may not sleep as long, but if you feel rested when you arise in the morning, you most likely had the appropriate amount of sleep. Not only is sleep important to recharge your body, but this is also the time during the day that your body releases growth hormones to repair the damage that occurred from the day's events.

Nutrition. Keeping your body properly fueled is as important as filling your car with the right type and amount of gas. Unfortunately, you cannot look at a gauge which tells you when to refuel; instead you use your appetite and thirst which is not as reliable. With a lower metabolism, you tend to eat less which also decreases your chance of getting the proper nutrients and protein, fat and carbohydrate building blocks. Multiple chronic deficiencies greatly increase your risk of back pain from a multitude of possibilities including low calcium which increases your risk of spine fractures and low vitamin D which is associated with low calcium as well as chronic pain.

What pain medicines can I take if I have liver problems?

Improper use of pain medications can be very dangerous if you also have liver problems. It is important to first discuss your liver status with your doctor as most medications are broken down by the liver. Medications can also either further damage your liver or result in much higher systemic doses which may have greater side effects or cause an unexpected overdose.

Acetaminophen above 3000 mg per day, or a lower dose over a very prolonged period of time can cause liver failure. Health patients taking 4000 mg per day, the recommended maximum dose, for 14 days were found to develop problems with their liver enzymes. Great caution should also be exercised with acetaminophen as it is often combined with other over-the-counter and prescription medications so you may be taking much more than you think without knowing it. It is important to look at the ingredient list from medications that you are using to look for either the chemical name for acetaminophen, APAP, or more common terms such as acetaminophen, paracetamol (in Europe), or Tylenol®. You should consider taking only one acetaminophen containing medication at a time.

Ibuprofen (Motrin®) at certain high doses can also stress the liver or worsen liver problems in patients with chronic liver disease.

Aspirin greater than 2000 mg per day can also cause liver damage.

Most opioid pain medications are partially metabolized in the liver; if your liver is not working well, you may actually be getting a much higher dose of the pain medication; in rare cases, you may overdose. You should completely avoid taking codeine as it is converted in your liver to morphine. If your liver is unable to

convert codeine to morphine then it will have no effect on your pain.

If you need a pain medication and your pain is in a specific region, consider using a topical pain medication as it is absorbed in the local tissue with a much lower systemic dose that your liver has to deal with.

Why should I use a cane for back pain?

Many of my patients do not want to be caught using a cane. They think it is a sign of weakness, slows them down or gets caught between their legs. A cane can offload up to 25% of your body weight from your spine and legs; thereby greatly decreasing pain. It can also improve your balance and allow you to walk greater distances with greater confidence. To use it properly, it should be used on the opposite side of your pain and extended forwards at the same time your painful leg or lower back is thrust forward. It does take some time to get used to, so begin using a cane carefully and slowly. One of my patients loves her cane, as it allows her to get a seat on a packed bus and she can shoo away people or dogs on the street. There are a great many options available from the very stylish walking sticks, to trekking poles and collapsible canes, so please consider it. Once your back pain is treated you can put it away until the next time or loan it to a friend.

Conclusion

Research shows that the longer back pain lasts, the more likely it will become not only chronic but will also worsen. The goal of any treatment is not only to alleviate sudden, severe back pain but to treat it permanently for good. This means that good detective work is critical to success. Remember MRIs do not tell the whole story. So gather your team together and get to work, your future life and happiness is at stake.

About The Author



Andre Panagos MD, MSc, CAC, FAAPMR

A true pioneer in regenerative spine and sports medicine, New York City physician Andre Panagos M.D. has been treating, preventing, and healing chronic pain for nearly two decades. His practice is dedicated to regenerative spine and sports medicine which makes Dr. Panagos a physician at the forefront of a new renaissance in medicine. He is board-certified by the American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, with an additional board certification in Pain Medicine. He is also a New York State certified Medical Acupuncturist, a practitioner in Functional Medicine and has extensive training in interventional ultrasonography. Dr. Panagos continuously reads medical texts and journals to further his education and travels throughout the country in order to learn cutting edge techniques in his field. He believes in utilizing the most advanced practices and techniques to

maximize function and improve quality of life, irrespective of often severe medical conditions. Dr. Panagos believes it is imperative to optimize health to allow the body to overcome disease. He has also been very fortunate and humbled to treat patients who were thought of as untreatable and return them to a fulfilling life, sometimes decades after the onset of serious illness.

Dr. Panagos is a fellow of the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and a member of several scientific organizations including the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine, North American Spine Society, International Spinal Intervention Society, Institute of Functional Medicine, American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine, New York County Medical Society and the Hellenic Medical Society. He is involved nationally with the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and is a reviewer for the *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* and *PM&R* journals.

Dr. Panagos received his medical degree and Master of Science degrees from St. George's University, School of Medicine. He completed his internship and residency in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the University of Washington, followed by an Orthopedic Sports and Interventional Spine Fellowship at Beth Israel Medical Center. Dr. Panagos also trained in medical acupuncture at the Helms Medical Institute/UCLA and was educated at the Institute of Functional Medicine.

Dr. Panagos is currently a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine at New York University Langone Medical Center. He previously served as an Assistant Attending Physiatrist at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital and as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College. He was the founding co-director of The Spine Center at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital and was the recipient of the first Willibald Nagler Clinical Scholar Award. Dr. Panagos was also honored with the 2009 Resident

teaching award in the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College.

Dr. Panagos has been involved in medical education for many years, including research articles, textbook chapters, television and magazine interviews and has given many national and international lectures. Dr. Panagos released his textbook, *Spine – A Rehabilitation Medicine Quick Reference*, in 2010 which broadly covered the complex field of spine care and looks forward to releasing several more titles to help his patients.