Is Stress Behind Your Backache?

Carrying around emotional stress is a burden your back may ultimately share with you. Mind-body research indicates that people who suffer psychological distress, depression or anxiety are much more likely to develop back pain – and lose work days from it – than people with better coping methods.

How can negative emotions trigger a physical reaction in the back?

One possibility is that emotional stress produces changes in the body’s nervous system that lead to muscle tension and eventual spasms. The connection makes sense – worrying about job, family or financial demands can build tension in your spine. The longer the tension lasts the greater the chance for pain.

The first step to prevention: Stay aware of stress and stop it before it causes tension in your back muscles. Here’s how:

Start with stress relief through relaxation techniques such as meditation and deep breathing. It doesn’t need to be complicated – during high stress times, try to escape for 10-20 minutes to sit quietly; allow your mind and body to settle down and release the tension and negative feelings.

Tip: To practice these skills, take some lessons at a local meditation-learning centre. Tai chi and yoga can produce tranquility and flexibility that reduce stress and improve back health. These exercises help 3 ways – they put your head in a better place, taking the focus off your back, while strengthening your back muscles.

Beginning a regular exercise program is one of the best ways to protect the spine and reduce repetitive stress. Remember, a strong back is a pain-free back.

Pap reminder: The Canadian Cancer Society says women who are sexually active should have a Pap test and pelvic examination every 1 to 3 years, depending on the screening guidelines in their province and each woman’s previous test results. Women who have had a total hysterectomy do not need to undergo regular Pap screening, unless the surgery was done as a treatment for cervical cancer or pre-cancer. Ask your provider if you are due for screening.

Breakfast may help lower teen obesity rates. Researchers at the University of Minnesota observed the eating habits of 2,200 adolescents and found that those who ate breakfast daily were more physically active and made healthier food choices; after 5 years they had also gained less weight and had lower body mass index levels compared to those who skipped breakfast. Researchers speculate that teens may skip breakfast hoping to save calorie intake, but a healthy breakfast can prevent overeating or even weight gain.

Why is cardio exercise important? Aerobic, or cardio, workouts strengthen the heart and lungs through sustained intensity – enough to raise your heart rate moderately. This type of exercise is considered very effective for weight control and health protection. For these benefits, exercise at least (a) 30 minutes at a moderately intense level, such as walking, 5 days a week OR (b) 20 minutes at a vigorously intense level, such as jogging, 3 days a week. To lose weight, lengthen your workouts to 60-90 minutes at a moderate level of activity.

IMMUNIZATIONS

Not sure if your vaccinations are current? Don’t put it off – review your needs with your provider. The Public Health Agency of Canada’s recommendations for adult vaccines include:

- Influenza (flu): every fall for most everyone, especially those age 65+.
- Tetanus and diphtheria: booster every 10 years.
- Pneumococcal (pneumonia): for age 65+ and those with chronic conditions.
- Varicella (chickenpox): for anyone who hasn’t had chickenpox.
- Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR): for anyone born in or after 1970 who is unvaccinated or hasn’t contracted these diseases.

Depending on individual circumstances, you may need additional vaccines. Recommendations change periodically, so check with your provider or visit www.phac-aspc.gc.ca.
**TOP 10 Exercise Bloopers**

The American Council on Exercise shares the following mistakes commonly cited by fitness professionals—and ways to correct them.

**ONE Exercising too hard or too fast.** A moderate workout for longer periods of time is more effective than exercising intensely for a few minutes. If you exercise for 30 minutes most days, increase speed and distance by no more than 10% per week.

**TWO Lack of variety.** Doing the same workout month after month can lead to fitness plateaus, boredom and overuse strain or injury. Mix up your activities.

**THREE Doing all or nothing.** Not having a full 30-60 minutes to exercise is no reason to skip your workout. Even 10 minutes of exercise is beneficial.

**FOUR Unrealistic goals.** Impractical goals often lead to exercise dropout, if not injury. Stick to a plan that suits you—a bit challenging but not so difficult you get discouraged from lack of progress.

**FIVE Not warming up.** Before every workout, warm up by using the movements you’ll be doing in the workout. Example: Start by walking slowly for 5-10 minutes and gradually increasing your pace.

**SIX Lifting too much weight.** Hefting more than your muscles can handle may cause jerking and other abnormal motions that lead to strain. Instead, gradually increase the resistance guided by proper form. Control the weights; don’t let them control you.

**SEVEN Not cooling down.** Allow your body to recover gradually by doing your warm-up in reverse, gradually slowing your pace.

**EIGHT Not stretching enough.** Mild stretching following your warm-up, and again after your workout, can prevent injuries, improve flexibility and prepare your body for your next workout.

**NINE Not adjusting machines to your body.** Improper fit can lead to poor results and injury. Follow your manufacturer’s guide; for gym equipment, get help from the staff.

**TEN Poor gym etiquette.** This can range from lingering on machines long after you are done, to not wiping your sweat from machines. Show consideration.

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**FEELING OUT OF BALANCE?**

If you’re longing to get more out of your personal time, small changes and a fresh outlook can add up to a greater sense of satisfaction. Free up time on your terms. For example:

**Be where you are.** When you are at work, all your focus should be on doing your job well and safely. When you are at home, your personal needs and time with family come first and foremost.

**Keep folks informed.** Be clear with loved ones about your work, plans and personal needs, such as exercise. Don’t make promises you can’t keep or take on too much in an effort to make others happy. When you’re feeling stress, seek help and understanding from those who care about you.

**Turn off.** The latest gadgetry allows you to be always connected—or get disconnected. Whether you’re taking a day off, a vacation or an hour set aside for your family or friends, enjoy it unplugged. Turn off your cell phone and computer; put your PDA or pager away (when you’re not on call for work).

Separation, mentally and physically, gives you time to recharge your batteries—so you can return to work with renewed purpose and enthusiasm.

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**Friends Behaving Badly? Negativity can be catching.**

The power of friendship lies in its ability to make you feel good, and that’s good for your health. But what if you tend to “catch” your friends’ moods? Hanging out with somebody who’s down or negative can drag you down too if you’re not careful.

Maybe you have a friend who…
- Is frequently rude to people.
- Thrives on gossip.
- Competes with you.
- Gives unsolicited advice.
- Is boastful or self-centered.
- Depends on you too much.
- Relishes the same problems without resolve.
- Complains about everything.

If you value the friendship, despite these character flaws, what will help both of you?

**Don’t try to change your friend.** But if your friend’s behaviour starts making you feel bad or uncomfortable, explain how you feel and be clear on your limits. Be sensitive and, chances are, your friend will appreciate the advice.

**Listen to your friends** vent rather than try to fix their problems. If things get intense, take a break to shake off the negativity.

**Encourage solutions** rather than dwelling on the problem. Find the heart of the matter—why is the issue so important to your friend? Validate the person’s feelings without wallowing in the problem.

Being a good friend does not mean making their problems your own—being supportive and providing a positive balance can build a healthier relationship.
Antibiotic Resistance
Regaining Germ Control

Antibiotic resistance is a major public health concern in the fight against superbugs. One example that recently made headlines is methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). While this bug has been around since the 1960s, it has grown increasingly common in hospitals and the general community. MRSA, which causes serious infections, resists the usual antibiotics. Scientists have found antibiotic resistance in numerous other bacterial strains.

How does resistance happen?
When we use an antibiotic repeatedly, some of the bacteria exposed to that antibiotic start to change; they become stronger and more able to fight back against the drug. Over time, the once-effective antibiotic no longer works for that bacterial infection.

Overuse of antibiotics eventually creates bacterial strains that can resist multiple drugs. These resistant bacteria can cause serious infections that are hard to treat. The result is longer illnesses, more doctor visits, extended hospital stays, the need for more toxic medications and sometimes death.

2-FOLD FIGHT to lower antibiotic resistance and risk of infections:
Take an antibiotic only when your provider has determined it’s necessary. Overuse builds antibiotic resistance and exposes your body to unwanted side effects.
Don’t take antibiotics to prevent or treat viral infections such as a cold, cough or flu. Antibiotics work only against bacteria, not viruses.

Keep clean. Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and water for at least 15 seconds – especially before eating and after using the toilet, changing diapers or cleaning a litter box. Tip: In the absence of soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner that contains at least 60% alcohol. These cleaners, unlike antibacterial soaps, can kill bacteria and viruses but won’t promote resistant bacteria.

Avoid close contact with others when you or they are sick.
Keep your fingers away from your mouth, nose and eyes to reduce germ entry.
Keep vaccinations up-to-date. Review them with your provider.
Don’t share personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers, towels, bedding and clothing.
Don’t love your pets so much. Avoid licks from dogs and cats.

Care for your skin, a first line of defense against disease. Untreated cuts, abrasions and open sores are welcome mats for infection.
Best advice: Maintain a healthy immune system – get adequate rest and exercise, manage stress, drink ample fluids, eat a balanced and nutritious diet and don’t smoke.

Q & A

Q: Latest buzz about coffee?
A: Recent studies in the U.S., Europe and Japan suggest that heavy drinkers of caffeinated or decaf coffee (6-plus cups a day) showed a lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes than those who drank little. However, the long-term effects of caffeine on type 2 are unknown. Researchers suspect that other substances in coffee, including antioxidants, may increase insulin sensitivity and reduce type 2 risk.

Research also suggests coffee may contribute to a lower risk of some diseases such as cardiovascular, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s.

While coffee may never qualify as a health drink, 2 or 3 cups a day (caffeinated or decaf) are okay for most people. Experts generally advise a limit of 200-300mg of caffeine daily.
But some people are sensitive to caffeine in any form. Cut back if you are prone to insomnia, stomach irritation or nervousness. Pregnant and nursing women should have no more than 150mg of caffeine (about 1 cup of coffee) from all sources; check with your provider. Small children should avoid it.

Rip Currents: JUST THE FACTS

Planning time at the beach? Watch for rough water – rip currents pose a serious threat to beachgoers. Learn to spot the danger signals:

- Rip currents are narrow, fast-moving currents that rush away from the ocean’s shoreline. They are often erroneously called rip tide or undertow.
- They can form at any surf beach with breaking waves, including the Great Lakes. Weather scientists report that rip currents of varying strengths are found at nearly every beach, nearly every day.
- Signs of rip currents include a channel of choppy water, changes in water colour, a break in wave patterns or foam, and seaweed or other debris being pulled steadily away from the shore. But clues are not always present.
- People often talk about being “pulled under” by a rip current, but this is a myth – rip currents run horizontally.
- Most drownings occur when swimmers panic at being pulled so far from shore or suffer fatigue from trying to swim straight back to the shoreline, fighting directly against the current.

The best way to get out of the grip of a rip: Swim parallel to the shore. If this is unsuccessful, simply tread water or float until you are out of the current, then swim cautiously back to shore. It’s important to stay calm to think clearly and conserve your energy.
Recipe of the Month

Mexican Style Chopped Salad

This is an easy, delicious dish combining 5 vegetables. Tip: Adding a bit of fat helps your body absorb more nutrients from the vegetables. Healthiest fat choices are extra virgin olive oil and avocado.

½ cup/119ml salsa
½ cup/119ml fat-free sour cream
1 avocado, peeled, pitted and diced
1 jicama, peeled and diced
2 roma tomatoes, seeded and sliced
1 red bell pepper, chopped
4 cups/224g chopped romaine lettuce
8 ounces/420ml or 227g cooked shrimp

Blend the salsa and sour cream in a mixing bowl. Combine vegetables and shrimp. When ready to serve, pour the salsa mixture over salad and toss to coat.

Nutrition Facts

Makes 4 servings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount Per Serving</th>
<th>Calories</th>
<th>Protein</th>
<th>Total Fat</th>
<th>Total Carb</th>
<th>Carbs</th>
<th>Sugar</th>
<th>Fibre</th>
<th>Sodium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>267</td>
<td>18 g</td>
<td>9 g</td>
<td>36 g</td>
<td>14.5 g</td>
<td>14.5 g</td>
<td>384 mg</td>
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Top-Rated FRUITS & VEGETABLES
How To Pick the Best-of-the-Best

FRUITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Berries</th>
<th>bright colours; plump; dry, no mould</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guava</td>
<td>green/orange skin; semi-soft; fragrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink grapefruit</td>
<td>colourful, thin, firm rind; heavy; flat at both ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiwi fruit</td>
<td>plump; evenly firm, not hard or soft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papaya</td>
<td>deep yellow rind; no bruises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantaloupe</td>
<td>light tan skin, not green; slightly soft stem end; fragrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peach</td>
<td>orange/red skin; firm, not hard or green; no bruises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mango</td>
<td>multi-coloured smooth skin; heavy; fragrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apricot</td>
<td>golden yellow to orange-yellow; plump, firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>solid yellow or lightly flecked brown skin; no bruises or soft spots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherries</td>
<td>plump; bright red or purplish-black; fresh stems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple grapes</td>
<td>plump; colourful, smooth skin; firmly attached to fresh-looking stems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VEGETABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spinach</th>
<th>deep green, crisp leaves; not wilted or crushed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swiss chard</td>
<td>crisp, colourful leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red bell pepper</td>
<td>bright red, smooth skin; firm, thick-fleshed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet potato</td>
<td>bright, uniform colour; firm, no decay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collard greens</td>
<td>deep green, crisp leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broccoli</td>
<td>deep green; compact bunches; no decay or yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels sprouts</td>
<td>bright green; firm, compact; smallish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow peas</td>
<td>bright green; crisp, firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter squash</td>
<td>hard, unblemished skin; rich colour; heavy for size; stem end intact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asparagus</td>
<td>straight, bright-green stalks; stiff tips, no moisture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avocado</td>
<td>shiny green or mottled purplish-black skin; yields to gentle pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cauliflower</td>
<td>firm heads with tightly packed creamy white clusters; fresh-looking green leaves; no blemishes or black spots</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our picks for the most powerful fruits and veggies are listed above. They represent the best in your quest for antioxidants and other substances that help protect your health. For maximum nutrition and fibre, pick a wide variety of tastes, textures and colours – and you’ll never be bored when dining on them every day.