

ORGANIZATION NEWS

Information/Education Page

Preventing Lower Back Pain Among Caregivers



Nearly 80% of people experience low back pain at some point in their lifetime. How does this happen? It is easy to hurt your back by lifting heavy objects or people, frequent bending, twisting, or straining your muscles. As a caregiver you do these things frequently. Taking steps to maintain a healthy back should be a priority.

Tips to prevent low back pain Learn how to protect your back when lifting

Try the following techniques to help protect your back during lifting:

- Stand close to the person you are about to assist
- Accentuate (or make bigger) the arch in your lower back
- Spread your feet wide (just wider than shoulder width)
- Bend at the hip and knees (causes your buttocks to stick out)
- Keep your head and chest up
- Lift from your legs (straighten them)
- Bend at the hip and knees to lower the person too
- Do not jerk or perform movements rapidly
- Ask the person you are assisting to help as much as possible

Admit that you feel pain when it first happens and do something about it

Most lower back problems do not begin with pain but with stiffness, especially when straightening and stretching your back.

- At the first sign of stiffness, try to avoid things that will make your back worse (eg, lifting, sitting for long periods). Stretching your back muscles ([fig 1A](#)) may help prevent the stiffness from becoming painful.
- If you develop back pain, seek the advice of a health care professional. A physical therapist who specializes in back pain can help. For more information about physical therapy, visit the Move Forward website (www.moveforwardpt.com) and type the phrase “low back pain” into the search bar.

Keep the arch in your lower back when you sit

It is important to remember that you can strain your lower back even when you are not providing care. Rounding your lower back during sitting ([fig 1B](#)) causes extra strain, especially if you sit for a

long period of time. Use correct posture with a slight arch in your lower back to reduce strain. It may help to place a pillow or rolled up towel behind your back when you sit ([fig 1C](#)).

Maintain a flexible back

Bending backward will help keep your back flexible and reduce the amount of stress from bending forward all day. This can be practiced while standing (see [fig 1A](#)) or sitting. Complete 10 repetitions of arching your back (or raising your arms over your head) as far as you can a few times per day.

Begin a fitness routine

Exercise improves your muscle strength and endurance and will help you provide care for someone without straining your back.

Know your limitations

Do not try to lift or transfer a heavy person by yourself if any of the following statements are true:

- You currently have back pain
- There is a risk the person might fall
- You are unsure how to help the person move

In these cases, ask for help with physically demanding home care responsibilities.

Remember that you are important, too!

Providing care for another person can be stressful. Take time to take care of yourself and reduce stress. Some ideas to manage stress include the following:

- Exercise
- Attend a support group for caregivers
- Talk to family or friends about stressful situations and how they are affecting you

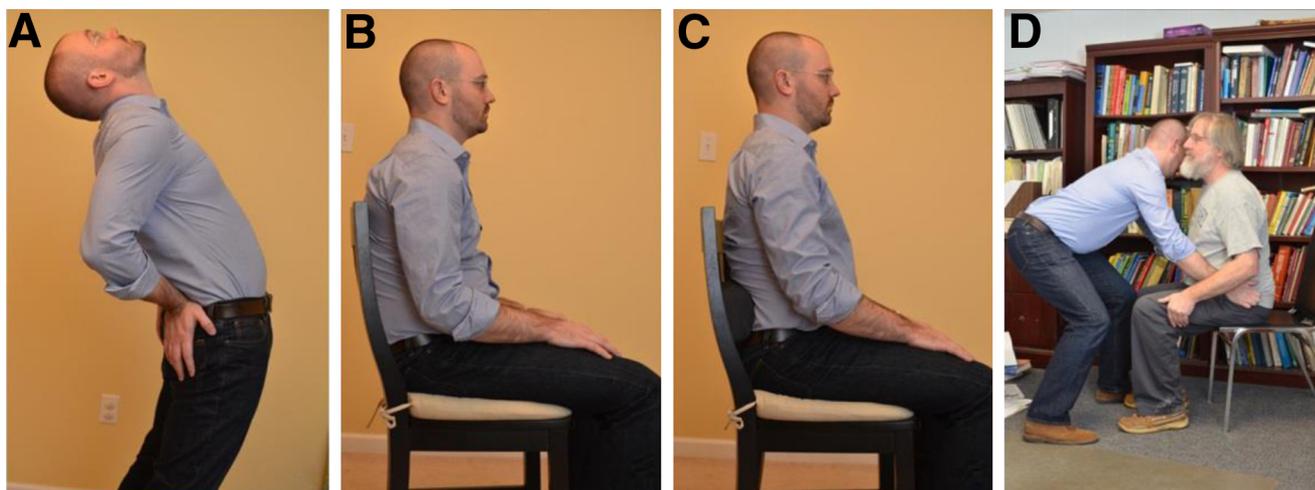


Fig 1 Examples of (A) extension in standing, (B) poor sitting posture, (C) maintaining the arch in the low back with a lumbar roll, and (D) proper lifting technique.

If you have access to a computer, further information and tips on managing stress can be found online (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>).

Disclaimer

This information is not meant to replace the sound advice from a medical professional. Should you have questions regarding this topic or specific medical concerns, consult with your health care provider. It is highly recommended you contact your health care provider before attempting some of these exercises if you are currently experiencing low back pain that has been present for >3 months. Similarly, if you have a complicated medical history you

should contact your physician to make certain it is safe to begin exercising.

Authorship

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