

Back pain - quiz

Test your knowledge on back pain with our quick health quiz, and read tips to prevent and treat a bad back.

1. How often do you exercise?

- A. Four or more days of the week.
- B. Once a week.
- C. Not at all, or hardly ever.

2. Are you currently at a healthy weight?

- A. No, I'm obese.
- B. Perhaps a few kilos overweight.
- C. I'm maintaining a healthy weight for my height.

3. Suppose you have to carry a heavy backpack. Which way do you carry it?

- A. By the straps, alternating hands to prevent fatigue.
- B. On my back with a strap over each shoulder.
- C. Slung over one shoulder, alternating shoulders to prevent fatigue.

4. How do you lift a heavy object?

- A. I squat down, hold the object close to my body, lift with my thighs and keep my back straight.
- B. I bend over at the waist, grasp the object and straighten up.
- C. I squat down, hold the object close, and stand up by straightening my legs and body at the same time.

5. What's your posture like after you've been sitting down for a while?

- A. My back is straight and my bottom is towards the back of the seat.
- B. My shoulders are rounded a little and my legs may be crossed at the knee.
- C. My bottom is resting on the front of the seat, my back is slumped and my head is craned forward.

6. Do you regularly perform stretching exercises to boost your flexibility?

- A. No, or hardly ever.
- B. Yes, but only as part of my warm-up and cool-down for sporting activities.
- C. Yes, I regularly stretch at least twice per week.

7. What's your mattress like?

- A. Soft – my bottom sinks lower into the mattress than the rest of my body.
- B. Firm – my shoulders and hips sink to about the same degree when lying on my side.
- C. Hard – in fact, lying on my mattress feels like lying on the floor.

See over...

Back pain – quiz answers

Correct answers

1. A= 3 points, B= 2 points and C= 1 point.

The best answer is A.

Regular exercise strengthens the abdominal muscles and the muscles of the back that support the spine. Exercise also increases flexibility and improves posture, which in turn reduces the risk of back pain.

2. A= 1 point, B= 2 points and C= 3 points.

The best answer is C.

Being overweight or obese puts extra strain on the muscles of the back. A pot or 'beer belly' indicates that your abdominal muscles are in poor shape. Strong abdominal muscles are like a girdle that supports your lower back, so it is in your best interests to work on flattening your tummy.

3. A= 1 point, B= 3 points and C= 2 points.

The best answer is B.

A backpack should always be worn properly. A heavy bag that's slung over one shoulder or held in one hand can, over time, cause chronic back problems. Risks include muscle strain, distortion of the natural 'S' curve of the spine and rounding of the shoulders.

4. A= 3 points, B= 1 point and C= 2 points.

The best answer is A.

Bending over at the waist to pick up objects can easily cause injuries, because your lower back isn't designed to take a heavy load. Always make sure you keep your back straight and lift with your thighs. Get some help if the load is too heavy to comfortably manage on your own.

5. A= 3 points, B= 2 points and C= 1 point.

The best answer is A.

Poor posture fatigues the deeper 'support' muscles of the back and forces the overlying 'movement' muscles to do most of the work. This can lead to complications such as chronic back pain, spinal dysfunction and joint degeneration. If you can't help but slump when sitting down for long periods, seriously consider buying ergonomic furniture.

6. A= 1 point, B= 2 points and C= 3 points.

The best answer is C.

Muscle tension can cause fatigue and localised pain. Without regular stretching, some back muscles could be held at a greater tension than others and, over time, this can pull vertebrae out of alignment.

See over...

7. A= 1 point, B= 3 points and C= 2 points.

The best answer is B.

Contrary to popular belief, hard mattresses aren't good for you – they can aggravate a sore back as much as a soft mattress can. It's best to choose a mattress that is firm, supportive and comfortable.

Your score

7–11: If you're not already suffering from chronic back pain, you will be soon. Your lifestyle habits are putting your back under unnecessary strain.

12–16: Some of your lifestyle choices could be increasing your risk of injury. Making a few changes here and there could dramatically reduce your experience of back pain.

17–21: Your healthy lifestyle choices are significantly reducing your risk of injury and chronic pain. Congratulations, you are taking good care of your back.

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