

# Is Your Home Hurting Your Back???

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Back pain is one of the leading causes of missed work and one of the main reasons for medical visits year after year. So why are so many of us suffering from back pain and letting it interfere with our life? The answer to this question is that most people live in homes are not designed to support your back in a good posture. What's worse is that many people are accustomed to performing everyday chores around the house in ways that increase strain on the back to the point that the spine and muscles surrounding the spine become weak, which leads to injury.

So what furniture around the house could be contributing to your back pain? All of the following objects that we utilize everyday could possibly be discouraging good posture and wreaking havoc on your back:

- Dining room table and chairs
- Mattresses
- Couch and recliners
- Sinks and counter tops
- Mirrors
- Shower
- Car seat

Older houses are especially notorious for having cramped spaces and numerous features which over time can be damaging to your body. This month take a "chiropractic tour" of your house with a blank sheet of paper and note all of the objects in each room that may be contributing to your back pain. Think about the habits and chores you do and write down ways to reform these behaviors. As you enter each of the main rooms in your house keep the following tips in mind:

## Living Room/Family Room

- Make sure that your couch is firm and provides adequate lumbar support
- When you are sitting on any piece of furniture try not to slouch in your chair. Engage your abdominal muscles and sit upright whenever possible

## Kitchen

- Ensure work surfaces are at a height taller than the length of your arms and about 30 degrees in front of your body
- Have a step stool nearby to rest one foot on to help relax the low back. This is also helpful if you need to reach for something on a high shelf by minimizing the possibility of overextending your muscles
- Spread your legs apart until your body is low enough to comfortably reach all countertops
- Use a stool to sit on periodically to give the low back a break
- Ensure that chairs in all dining areas provide adequate lumbar support

## Bathroom

- Install a mirror that pivots to minimize leaning forward over the sink or vanity
- If you have to bend forward to get your head under the shower head, install a hand held shower head, or add an extension
- If you know you will be standing in front of the sink/vanity for longer than 5 minutes, place one foot on a low step stool to put the low back into a neutral position

We spend a great deal of time sleeping and it is important to prevent stress on our body during this time of rejuvenation and restoration.

## Bedroom

- Before you buy any mattress, try it for at least 10 minutes

- Avoid pillow tops, extra firm, or extra plush mattress designs
- If you sleep on your side, use a body pillow between the knees and under the neck
- If you sleep on your back, use a contoured pillow for your neck and place a pillow under your knees
- AVOID sleeping on your stomach
- Turn your mattress every time you change the sheets
- Switch sides of the bed 1-2 times/year
- Use good posture getting in and out of bed and when changing positions

Many people also spend a lot of time in front of the computer. Making sure your office space is designed to fit your body is also very important.

#### Office/Study

- Make sure your computer screen is at eye level and directly in front of you
- Keep your feet flat on the floor or on a step stool
- Consider purchasing an adjustable ergonomic chair so that your knees are never higher than your hips and can fit all members of the family
- Elbows should be kept as close to your sides as possible
- Rotate your chair so that you can always turn toward whatever task you are completing at your desk

As you enter the garage take a look at your vehicle. Getting in and out of your car can be one of the most stressful positions on the lower back. The discs are at their weakest when we bend and twist at the same time, which is how most of us get in and out of the car.

#### In the Car:

- Always try to sit sideways in your seat first and then pivot your body around until your body is facing forward
- Bucket seats are NOT ergonomic
- Use a lumbar support or pillow
- Adjust your headrest so that it is not pushing your head forward
- When moving from the brake to the gas pedal, lift up the foot each time instead of pivoting on your heel. Chances are your heel is over your brake, but your toes are on the gas, which can lead to knee, hip and low back problems.
- Pay attention to crash test ratings. The higher the rating, the less stress will occur to your body in an event of an accident.

It is so easy to find things for our home that look good, feel good or are a great price, but when it comes to really being a good buy, you should also take into consideration the quality of the design. There is no reason to buying a piece of furniture simply because it matches a piece of artwork or the drapes if it is uncomfortable or even painful to sit on. Most furniture is not designed specifically for giving us the best support for our backs, although more options are definitely becoming increasingly available.

To sum up, the most important features you should look for when buying furniture and accessories for your home are:

- Lumbar support – Seats that fit the contour of your spine
- It MUST be comfortable over extended periods of time
- Look for "ergonomic" designs

We all have our routines of how we do things throughout the day. Most of the time, we are unaware of how our habits affect our bodies until we start to have pain. Try to incorporate these steps throughout your home and reduce your risk of back pain