



Student Wellness Centre

student.wellness@usask.ca

wellness.usask.ca

306-966-5768



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

If You Have Back Pain

If you are experiencing back pain or an injury, consider visiting your doctor, getting a massage, or seeing a chiropractor or physiotherapist. You can book an appointment with one of these professionals through the Student Wellness Centre using the QR code on the back of this pamphlet. Your health plan will reimburse some or all these costs.

Tips to Minimize Back Pain

Here are some tips for preventing or minimizing the occurrence of back pain:

- **Listen to your body** and do not push through pain during any exercise or activities.
- Set up your **work** and **home office ergonomically**. Use a small lumbar support at your waist level when sitting, feet flat on the floor with the knees at a 90 degree angle. The middle of the computer monitor should be at eye level and the keyboard just above your lap with

the arms at 90 degrees or a little lower.

- Use **good body mechanics** when lifting or moving objects. Avoid bending over at the waist to pick things up. Use your legs, never your back.
- A tight neck and hamstrings also put unneeded pressure on the back. Make sure to **stretch all areas of the body**.
- **Strong core muscles** help support your back. Simple balance exercises, such as standing on one leg for one to two minutes, will work your abdominal muscles without the need for sit-ups.
- If you are **restarting an exercise routine, start low and slow**. See how your body adapts before increasing time or intensity.
- Go for a **30 minute walk** every day.

Tip

To avoid injuries, always warm up and stretch before vigorous activities.

Preventing Back Pain:

Good posture is important for back health, whether you are working out, shovelling, gardening, or just sitting in the car on a road trip. While the best posture for every activity is different, a good standing posture is a great place to start. One way to check your standing posture is to have someone take a photo of you from the side. In the photo:

- Your knees should have a slight bend to them.
- You should have a slight curve in your lower back. If you have little to no curve, try tilting your hips forward slightly. If you have a large curve, try tilting your hips backwards slightly. You may need to widen your feet and readjust the bend in your knees.
- Your upper back should curve outwards slightly. Your shoulders should be loose and in line with your back. If they are pulled forward, try to relax your chest, and engage the muscles between your shoulder blades. Do the opposite for shoulders that are pulled backwards.
- Your neck should have a slight curve and your chin should be level with the floor. If your chin is pushed forward, try to relax your head

back. If your neck is straight, try relaxing your shoulders and neck. Try to hold your good posture position for as long as is comfortable. Each time you readjust your posture, you should be able to hold it for a little longer.

The Right Shoes

- A good shoe will fit well, absorb some of the force of walking, and support the arches of your foot. A 1/2-inch heel or less is recommended.
- Limit how often you wear high heels and shoes that are flat or not anchored to your foot. These can change how you stand and walk, possibly leading to a sore back.
- Falls are a common cause of broken bones and back pain, so make sure your shoes are grippy enough to prevent them. In the winter, consider using removable snow grips when it's icy out.

Sleep Well

- A good sleeping position can support your spine and is easily achieved with the right pillows
 - Back sleepers should choose a pillow with a higher neck and lower head, to support the curve of the neck. Placing a pillow under your knees to support the curve in your lower back.
 - To avoid unnecessary neck and upper back strains, side sleepers should choose a thick pillow that keeps your head and neck in line with your spine. Placing a firm pillow between your knees helps keep your hips in line and stops your back from twisting. You may also find it useful to hold a fluffy pillow to your chest to support your shoulder.
 - To support the lower back curve, stomach sleepers should sleep with a pillow under their hips. To minimize the strain on your neck and spine, either use a very thin pillow or don't use a pillow at all.
- **Have a firm, but comfortable bed.** If your mattress is worn out, mattress toppers are a good temporary solution if you can't get a new mattress.
- Before you get up in the morning, **stretch in bed.**

Sit Well

- Sit towards the far edge of non-ergonomic chairs to maintain an upright posture and reduce your ability to slouch. In ergonomic chairs with supportive, curved backs you can sit with your back on the backrest.
- Keep your hips higher than or equal to your knees; ideally your knees should be at a 90- degree angle.
- Set up your work and home office ergonomically. Use a small lumbar support at your waist level when sitting and keep your feet flat on the floor. The middle of the computer monitor should be at eye level and the keyboard just above your lap, so your elbows are at a 90-degree angle. Slightly lower is okay too.
- Shift positions slightly every 30 minutes to decrease strain on your back muscles.
- Try to get up and move for at least five minutes every hour. If you are sitting for a long time while studying, use this as an excuse to take a break, get a drink, and stretch

If You Do Have Back Pain

See a doctor immediately if you experience any of the following, especially related to back pain or a back injury:

- Fever,
- Weight loss,
- Inflammation or swelling on the back,
- Constant back pain that does not ease during rest,
- Pain that travels to the chest or down the legs
- Recent trauma or injury to the back,
- Loss of bladder control or inability to pass urine,
- Numbness around the genitals, buttocks, or anus.

Using Heat or Ice

- If you injure your back, make an appointment with a doctor or physical therapist. While you wait to see them, consider icing your back with a cold pack or bag of

frozen vegetables, fruit, rice, or snow. Place the ice on your back where you feel the pain for 10 minutes. Take it off for at 30 minutes, then repeat one to two more times. You can repeat this cycle up to 3 times a day, about 3 hours apart.

- If your back is sore but you have not injured it, consider applying heat. One easy way to apply heat is having a warm bath for 15-30 minutes. You can also use a heat pack, hot water bottle, or heating pad the same way you would ice.
- **Using ice and heat safely:** Never apply ice and heat directly to your skin; always wrap ice and heat in a towel or at least two layers of a thick tshirt. Ice and heat should not hurt; if it does, remove it. Do not apply ice or heat if you cannot feel the temperature difference. If you feel dizzy, ill, or faint while using ice or heat, remove it and do not reapply without consulting a doctor

Is Your Backpack Right for You?

Over 80% of adults will experience back pain in their life. For many students their bags may be the problem. Are you one of them?

- Does your bag weigh less than 10% of your body weight? The average textbook weighs 3-5 lbs. If you carry more than two texts, chances are that you are straining your back. A waist belt or wheeled bag can help reduce back strain.
- Does your bag fit you? (Close to the body, not hanging more than 10 cm [4"] below the belt line?)
- Are you wearing both straps on your shoulders? If you have a messenger bag, are you wearing the strap across your chest? Wearing your bag unevenly on your body can cause pain and a permanent curve in your spine.
- Are the straps adjustable? If your bag is hanging low or pulling on your arms, you may have the wrong sized bag.
- Are the straps on your bag at least 5 cm (2") wide? Thin straps can cut off circulation causing numbness and tingling to your hands, arms, and neck.

- Is your bag packed well, with heavy items closest to your body? Carrying heavier items closer to you reduces back strain. Try to keep items secured in compartments to prevent moving and back tension.

If you answered **YES** to all of the above questions your bag is ideal for a healthy back! If you answered **NO** to any of these questions, it may be time for a change in your bag.

Did You Know?

Student Wellness Centre offer Massage Therapy, Chiropractic Services, and Physiotherapy for students and staff. Your health plan will reimburse some or all these costs.

Additional Resources

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