

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Bone and Joint Decade National Awareness Week

During “Bone and Joint Decade National Awareness Week,” Oct. 12-20, the American Chiropractic Association (ACA) and health care organizations worldwide urge you to take steps to prevent musculoskeletal problems before they negatively impact your life. The Bone and Joint Decade is a global, multidisciplinary initiative targeting the care of people with musculoskeletal conditions—or bone and joint disorders. Its focus is to help improve your quality of life as well as advance the understanding and treatment of musculoskeletal conditions through research, prevention and education.

Doctors of chiropractic have long emphasized the importance of spinal health, posture and other lifestyle factors in the body’s ability to function optimally. The ACA and your local doctor of chiropractic offer the following advice to help improve and maintain your musculoskeletal health.

At the Office:

- Make sure your chair fits correctly. There should be 2 inches between the front edge of the seat and the back of your legs. Sit with your feet flat on the floor, with your knees at a 90-degree angle. If you can’t sit that way, use an angled or elevated footrest.
- Take periodic stretch breaks. Clench your hands in a fist and rotate your hands 10 circles in, then 10 circles out. Put your hands in a praying position and squeeze together for 10 seconds and then “pray” with the backs of your hands together, fingers pointed downward for 10 seconds. Spread your fingers apart and then bring them together one by one.
- Hold the telephone with your hand or use the speakerphone. Don’t cradle the phone between your ear and shoulder.

- Take breaks and alternate tasks that use different muscle groups.
- Arrange your desk so that everything is handy - phone, mouse, reference materials, reports - to minimize awkward stretching and reaching.
- Position your computer monitor so that the middle of your chin is aligned with the middle of your monitor. This will allow for good neck posture.

At Home:

- When you wash the dishes, open the cabinet beneath the sink, bend one knee, and put your foot on the shelf under the sink. Lean against the counter so some of your weight is supported in front.
- When resting or watching TV, don’t use the sofa arm as a pillow. The angle is much too sharp for the neck.
- Don’t bend from the waist when you lift a child. Squat with your back straight. Keep the child close to you and use your legs and arms to lift.

In the Yard:

- If you shovel snow, push the snow straight ahead. Don’t try to throw it and walk it to the snow bank. Avoid twisting and turning motions. Bend your knees to lift. Let your legs and arms do the work, not your back. Take frequent rest breaks.
- When raking leaves, use a scissors stance: right foot forward and left foot back for a few minutes; then reverse. Bend at the knees, not the waist, as you pick up leaves. Make piles small to decrease the possibility of back strain.
- For mowing, use your weight to push the mower. Whenever possible, use ergonomically correct tools for the job.

Playing Sports:

- Warm up slowly before a game. Do calisthenics, flexibility exercises, or light running to increase your heart rate.
- When sweat beads form, your body is at the proper temperature to stretch the tendons and muscles.

While Traveling:

- When driving, adjust your car seat so you can sit firmly against the seat back. Buckle your seatbelt and shoulder harness, and adjust the headrest so that it supports the center of the back of the head.
- Invest in a wheeled suitcase that has a sturdy handle.
- Don't always carry the weight on one side - take frequent breaks and transfer the weight to the other side.
- Don't try to carry too much.
- When traveling by air, check all bags heavier than 10 percent of your body weight. Overhead lifting of any significant amount of weight should be avoided. While lifting your bags, stand directly in front of the overhead compartment so the spine is not rotated. Do not lift your bags over your head, or turn or twist your head and neck in the process.
- While seated in an airplane, vary your position occasionally to improve circulation. Bring your legs in, and move your knees up and down.

For Children:

- Have a smaller table for them where they can do their homework. If the child's feet don't touch the floor, place a footrest or box under the feet. Position the computer monitor so the top of the screen is at or below their eye level.
- Make sure the straps of your child's backpack are padded and worn over both shoulders. The contents of the backpack should not weigh more than 10 percent of your child's weight.

- If your child is involved in sports, make sure all equipment, including helmets, pads and shoes, fits your child properly. If your teenage child is involved in soccer, make sure they are taught how to "head" the ball properly. A young child should not use the heading technique at all, according to ACA experts.
- Make sure your child receives enough calcium. ACA recommends 1 percent or skim milk for children over 2 years old, and whole milk for those younger than 2.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of water. Caffeine can dehydrate your youngster, and the high levels of phosphorous in sodas and other carbonated beverages can interfere with calcium absorption.

While the ACA encourages you to follow these tips for better musculoskeletal health, remember that good spinal health is but one component in a healthy lifestyle. Exercising, getting a good night's sleep, drinking plenty of water and eating a nutritious diet contribute not only to health but also to the ability to heal after an injury.

For more information on Bone and Joint Decade efforts in the United States, visit www.usbjd.org. ■

 American Chiropractic Association

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at www.acatoday.org or call 800-986-4636.