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Low back pain significantly affects 80% of the adult population at some point in their lives. It is the most common cause of limited activities in adults 45 years and younger. Ten million people are out of work daily in the U.S. due to low back pain. People who have sedentary jobs have the same incidence of low back pain as those who perform manual labor. Typically, attacks of acute low back pain start at about age 25, become greater in intensity by age 35 and peak between the ages of 40 to 45. Often times, low back pain is self limiting. Forty four percent of low back pain patients are better in one week, 86% are better in one month and 92% are better in two months.

Of greatest significance, however, is that 90% of all low back pain patients have recurrences and 35% go on to develop sciatica. Sciatica occurs when a nerve in the low back becomes irritated and causes pain, numbness and tingling or burning sensations down the leg. This can further develop into leg and foot weakness and other neurological symptoms such as bowel and bladder dysfunction. These symptoms need to be addressed immediately.

The key to low back pain is not just getting an individual out of pain, but educating them and giving them the proper tools to help them decrease their chance of recurrence of low back pain and the development of sciatica. There are many causes of low back pain including muscle strain, degeneration, a herniated or bulging disc, an inflamed nerve, stenosis or shrinking of the holes where the nerves and spinal cord sit, etc... Most low back pain is not caused by a single event. It is usually caused by repetitive stress. For example, if you wanted to break a paper clip in half you wouldn't give it one big tug. Instead, you would repeatedly bend it until the metal fatigued and the paper clip broke. It is the same idea as in the last straw that broke the camel's back. This same concept applies to the back. Examples include gardening for extended periods of time in a crouched position and then lifting a bucket, driving home from the market and then lifting a grocery bag and repetitive lifting. These activities all increase the chance of injuring the low back because they fatigue the structures of the low back setting them up for failure.

There are many ways to decrease the chance of injuring the low back. Changing positions frequently gives the tissues of the low back a microbreak and allows them to recuperate. Standing up and reaching toward the sky with your hands or doing standing back bends can also be highly effective. These moves cause extension in the low back and help to reposition the disc, thus helping to prevent a "slipped" or herniated disc. Using a lumbar roll or small pillow behind your back, at the level of your belly button while you are sitting helps to maintain proper posture. For the gentlemen in the audience, remove your wallet from your back pocket while you are sitting. This levels the hips and keeps the back straight while sitting. These are just a few

simple ideas to help reduce the stress on your low back.

Research has shown that low back strengthening exercises do not decrease the incidence of low back pain. Gym exercises, sit-ups and normal strenuous activities performed throughout the day do not exercise the appropriate low back or abdominal muscles to decrease the incidence of low back pain. However, low back endurance exercises and neuromuscular reeducation targeting specific muscles do decrease the incidence of low back pain. These exercises, along with the concept of maintaining a neutral spine should be taught by a qualified practitioner.

Effective and well researched conservative treatments for low back pain include Chiropractic manipulation, McKenzie therapy, Acupuncture, massage and medication. Often times, a combination of these treatments can have a greater effect than any one treatment alone. Any person who has low back pain for more than one week or who has symptoms radiating into the legs should seek the care of a healthcare professional.

Newtown Performance Chiropractic
153 South Main Street, Newtown, CT 06470 (203) 426-6600 or (203)
417-3375