

How to Protect Your Spine

Most people are concerned about brushing their teeth, wearing sunscreen, and getting enough sleep, but often ignore one of the most important parts of their bodies: the spine. The entire central nervous system originates in the brain and channels down through the spinal column – extending to every part of the body.

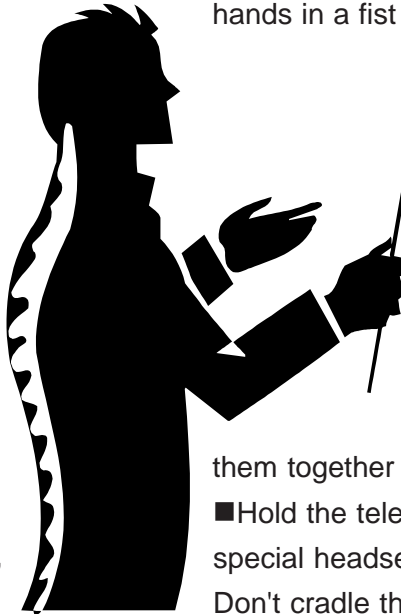
No matter what activities you include in your typical day, they may be taking a toll on your spine. Bending, reaching – even sitting in front of your computer – can result in painful muscles, injury, and a misaligned spine. You may not pay attention to your spine, neck, shoulders, or back until they hurt, but by reading the tips below, you'll learn how to prevent much of that pain and keep your spine safe! Be sure to share these tips with friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

At the office –

- Make sure your chair fits correctly. There should be two 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 foot rest.

- Take periodic stretch breaks. Clench your hands in a fist and move your hands like this:



10 circles in, then 10 circles out. Put your hands in a praying position and squeeze together for 10 seconds, 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, use a special headset, or use a speaker phone. Don't cradle the phone between your ear and shoulder. This can lock the spinal joints in the neck and upper back and eventually cause pain.

Playing sports –

- Warm up slowly before a game. Do calisthenics or light running to increase your heart rate slowly. When sweat beads begin to form, your body is at the proper temperature to stretch tendons and muscles.
- Don't over-extend yourself. Rest when

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before duplicating.*

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you're tired and drink plenty of water. Pick a sport that fits your ability and lifestyle and play wisely.

At home –

■When you wash 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 your 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 –

■Before gardening, exercise to warm up. Stretching is critical to prevent injuries. Kneel instead of bending in all outdoor work and alternate your weight as much as possible to balance the muscles you use.

■When raking leaves, use a scissors stance: right foot forward and left foot back for a few minutes, then reverse. Bend at your knees, not your waist as you pick up leaves or debris. Make piles small to decrease strain on your spine. For mowing, use your weight to push the mower. Whenever possible, use ergonomically correct tools for your job.

Your Spine & Chiropractic Care –

Chiropractic care centers on the spinal column and nervous system, offering a safe, holistic approach to healing. A misalignment of a vertebra may cause a "pinched" or inhibited spinal nerve that may result in back pain, headaches, and numerous other ailments. That's why spinal adjustments can help the body heal more effectively. Don't neglect your chiropractic adjustments. Talk with your doctor of chiropractic about the proper frequency of adjustments for you and your spine. ■

Spinal Vitals

The vertebral column (also called the backbone, spine, or spinal column) consists of a series of 33 irregularly shaped bones, called vertebrae. These 33 bones are divided into five categories depending on where they are located in the backbone:

CERVICAL

7 vertebrae (C1-C7)

The first seven vertebrae are called the cervical vertebrae. Located at the top of the spinal column, these bones form a flexible framework for the neck and support the head. The first cervical vertebra is called the atlas and the second is called the axis. The atlas' shape allows the head to nod "yes" and the axis' shape allows the head to shake "no."

THORACIC

12 vertebrae (T1-T12)

The next twelve vertebrae are called the thoracic vertebrae. These bones move with the ribs to form the rear anchor of the rib cage. Thoracic vertebrae are larger than cervical vertebrae and increase in size from top to bottom.

LUMBAR

5 vertebrae (L1-L5)

After the thoracic vertebrae, come the lumbar vertebrae. These five bones are the largest vertebrae in the spinal column. These vertebrae support most of the body's weight and are attached to many of the back muscles.

SACRAL

5 (fused) vertebrae (S1-S5)

The sacrum is a triangular bone located just below the lumbar vertebrae. It consists of four or five sacral vertebrae in a child, which become fused into a single bone after age 26. The sacrum forms the back wall of the pelvic girdle and moves with it.

COCCYGEAL

3-5 vertebrae (Co1-Co5)

The bottom of the spinal column is called the coccyx or tailbone. It consists of 3-5 bones that are fused together in an adult. Many muscles connect to the coccyx.

