

To Your Health is brought to you by:



Multi-Med Center
Dr. David Taylor, D.C.
74 Main St
Greenfield, MA 01301
USA
<http://www.taylorchiro.com>
dntaylordc@comcast.net
(413) 774-7501



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To: Dr. David Taylor

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[Avoiding High-Risk Moments for Your Low Back](#)



When it comes to your [lower back and injury risk](#), there are two critical times when you need to be especially careful. One is first thing in the morning. Your back is actually swollen at that time. You are substantially taller, and the discs have extra fluid in them. A careless forward bend or twist first thing in the morning can do substantial damage to your discs or other back structures. It doesn't seem fair that such a simple thing, bending and twisting, something you have done thousands of times before, can suddenly cause big problems.

The other critical time is after you have been sitting. Long car drives or airplane trips are especially challenging. In this case, the culprit is something called "creep." This means that your ligaments and tendons lengthen into the position that you have been in. Think of sitting as a bent-forward position, as your legs are forward. The ligaments and tendons do not provide protection properly when they have been lengthened by creep. When you first get up from sitting, you are at risk. The longer you have been sitting, the higher the risk. If you sit more upright, with good lumbar support, you will have somewhat less risk.

Common Events That Can Cause Back Pain

- *Scenario #1:* You didn't sleep well last night, perhaps from sleeping in an unfamiliar bed after travel, after sitting too long. You get up, feel stiff, but ignore it. You sit down in a soft chair to enjoy your morning hot drink. You get up and get a sudden sharp stab in the back.
- *Scenario #2:* You get up from sleeping, and sit at your laptop, and get entranced by a video or article. You end up sitting far longer than you planned. You get up, and can't completely straighten up.
- *Scenario #3:* You get up from sleeping, drink your morning coffee, which wakes up your gut, and you go to bathroom to empty your bowel. You are a bit constipated, and have to strain. When you get up from the toilet, your back spasms.

Overnight sleeping, even a good sleep on your favorite bed, leaves your back somewhat swollen. Swollen may be an exaggeration, but the reality is that there is extra fluid in all of your joints.

Two Ways to Minimize Injury/Pain Risk

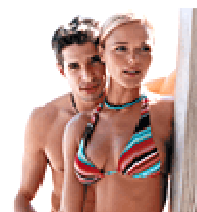
1. *Don't bend over immediately after sitting.* Sitting, even in good posture, puts you at risk. The longer you sit and the worse the seat, the more at risk you are. Airlines are very risky; it's hard to get up and move around because of the tight quarters, and the minute the plane stops, you bend over and get stuff from under the seat, or reach up, and twist and lift to get your bag from the overhead compartment. After a long sit, give yourself at least a few seconds of backward bending and/or moving around to reset your spine. Then you can carefully, using your hips rather than your back, bend over to pick up something.
2. *When you sit, don't slump.* Slumping reinforces the risks, makes it more likely for something bad to happen to your discs or joints or muscles. So, sit up straight, and keep your back in neutral. Neutral means that you keep a bit of a lordosis in your lower back, keep the lumbar spine from slumping forward, stay more upright. This simple action can make a huge difference. Like any habit, this will require you to "Just Do It" for a few weeks.

Talk to your doctor about these and other high-risk moments for your lower back and what you can do to relieve low back pain or avoid the pain altogether.

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Exercises to Ensure You're Swimsuit Ready

The dreaded swimsuit season is upon us. It's time to see just how much our bodies have changed over the course of a long winter, which can be an eye-opening experience. The fitness industry knows how traumatic this can be for you; that's why every year there are countless new books, diets, videos, and



magazines dispensing advice on how to get in shape for summer. Unfortunately, most of these "great" ideas involve quick-fix starvation diets and equipment-intensive workouts that are often difficult to follow. Inevitably, the weight comes back (with a few extra pounds added) because these quick-fix programs lower your metabolic set point, making your body more prone to storing body fat. And that's the last thing you want to do!

So, what's the answer? Well, it's really quite simple and boils down to one simple word: MOVEMENT! Here are some of the best exercises to ensure you're swimsuit ready this summer - and every month thereafter. It's a sample program that's quick, easy and positively invigorating

- 3-5 minutes of brisk walking
- 30 seconds of bear walks, 20 seconds of push-ups (repeat)
- 30 seconds of spiderman walks, 20 seconds of squats (repeat)
- 30 seconds of crab walks, 20 seconds of crunches (repeat) 30 seconds of duck walks, 20 seconds of push-ups (repeat)
- 3-5 minutes of slow walking

Push-Ups: Perform a standard push-up. If too difficult to perform, put your knees on the ground or change your angle by leaning against a wall.

Abdominal Crunches: Lie on your back and raise your legs off the ground. Grasp hands behind the head to cradle the neck, but do not pull the neck. Curl up, bringing the knees toward the chest and contracting your stomach.

Squats: Stand shoulder-width apart with arms extended in front of the body. Bend your knees, going parallel to the ground like you are sitting in a chair. Hold position for one second and return to starting position, being careful not to lock out your knees.

"Animal Movements": Each animal walk below works different muscles and helps with balance, circulation, cardiovascular health, flexibility, and body toning. Make sure you breathe normally during this and all animal walks.

Spiderman walks: These are great for the hips, legs, back and arms. Start in a crouch position with your feet and your hands on the ground. Bring your right hand forward. Lift up your right leg and bring it up to meet your right hand. Make sure you keep your buttocks down; don't lift them up too much. Now bring your left hand forward. Lift up your left leg and bring it up to meet your right hand. Repeat sequence.

Crab walks. These will work your arms, back, and lower body. Begin by sitting on the ground. Put your arms on the ground behind you and lift up your hips. Walk forward on your hands and heels, trying to keep your hips as high as possible. Repeat.

Duck walks. These will work your lower body like you have never felt. Get into a squatting position with your hands at your sides. Step forward with your left foot, then with your right foot. Keep walking like this until you can't go any farther. Breathe naturally.

Bear walks. Bear walks will work your arms, back, chest and lower body. These will also get you out of breath really quickly! Find a large area to do this exercise. Put all your weight on your hands and feet. Bring your right hand and left foot forward. Then your left hand and right foot. Keep going.

This is a fun, effective workout that will enhance your physique and get you swimsuit ready. With additional movement comes greater flexibility, a leaner physique and more muscle tone. Summer shape-up can finally be an enjoyable time for physical fitness. (Note: It is highly recommended that you get full medical clearance for intense physical activity from your doctor prior to beginning any exercise program.) Move smarter. Move better. Look better. Sounds like the perfect combination. See you at the beach.

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The ABCs of BPA - What You Should Know



Bisphenol A, otherwise known as BPA, is a chemical that has been linked to the development of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. For example, a recent study, results of which were published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, found that higher urinary BPA concentrations were associated with elevated rates of both conditions.

That's important to know because it's been estimated that up to 90 percent of U.S. adults have some level of BPA in their body (as seen from urine samples), which makes sense (unfortunately) if you consider that BPA has been used since the 1960s in many hard plastic bottles and to line food and beverage containers.

According to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, there are certain precautions that can be taken to protect adults, children and infants from the potential hazards of BPA, including the following:

- Don't microwave polycarbonate plastic food containers. Polycarbonate is strong and durable, but over time it may break down from overuse at high temperatures.
- Polycarbonate containers that contain bisphenol A usually have a #7 on the bottom of the container.
- Reduce your use of canned foods.
- Whenever possible, opt for glass, porcelain or stainless-steel containers, particularly for hot food or liquids.

- Always use baby bottles that are BPA free.

For more information about BPA, visit www.niehs.nih.gov/news/media and click on "Since You Asked - Bisphenol A" on the left-hand toolbar. Your doctor can also provide information on the dangers of BPA and suggest safer alternatives.

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This newsletter was sent from Multi-Med Center, Dr. David Taylor, D.C. - 74 Main St,
Greenfield, MA 01301, USA