

wellnessNEWS

Ideas to help you *LIVE WELL* from the ENCANA WELLNESS CENTRE

Back Pain: the myths

(Source: www.employment.alberta.ca)

Myth: If your back hurts, you should take it easy until the pain goes away.

Truth: Today's thinking is to continue the routine activities of daily living and work as normally as possible. If you remain active, you'll do better than either bed rest or immediate exercise. Those with physically demanding jobs may not be able to return to work as quickly as those with less demanding or sedentary jobs. It is often helpful to have workers with back pain return to some form of light work until they recover more fully.

Myth: Most back pain is caused by injuries or heavy lifting.

Truth: Regardless of whether or not the work you are doing involves lifting, you are more likely to be injured early in the morning, when your back is stiffer. Up to 85 per cent of people with back pain can't recall a specific incident that brought on their pain. While heavy lifting or injuries are risk factors for back pain, they don't account for most episodes of pain.

Other factors:

Age — the highest frequency of reported symptoms for back pain occurs between the ages of 35 to 55.

Gender — if you're male, your risk of injury peaks at approximately 40 years of age; among women, the peak occurs between 50 and 60 years of age.

Lifestyle — smoking and being overweight are two other factors linked to lower back pain. A connection has also been made between stressful life events and back pain.

Myth: Back pain is usually disabling.

Truth: Most people with back pain get better, although sometimes it may take a few weeks or months to recover. The downfall is that if you've experienced back pain in the past, you're at greater risk of experiencing it again.

Who can cure the pain?

(Source: www.employment.alberta.ca)

See a health practitioner you trust (i.e. chiropractor, acupuncturist, physiotherapist, massage therapist, etc – all of which are available at Optimal Therapies located in the EnCana Wellness Centre). That person can rule out the possibility of an underlying medical condition and may be able to help you treat the cause of your back pain.

Reducing back pain by fixing your office chair

(Source: www.spine-health.com)

Here are the most important guidelines to help ensure that your office chair and work area are as comfortable as possible and will cause the least amount of stress to your spine:

1. Elbow measure: First, begin by sitting comfortably as close as possible to your desk so that your upper arms are parallel to your spine. Rest your hands on your work surface (e.g. desktop, computer keyboard). If your elbows are not at a 90-degree angle, adjust your office chair height either up or down.

2. Thigh measure: Check that you can easily slide your fingers under your thigh at the leading edge of the office chair. If it is too tight, you need to prop your feet up with an adjustable footrest. If you are unusually tall and there is more than a finger width between your thigh and the chair, you need to raise the desk/work surface so that you can raise the height of your office chair.

3. Calf measure: With your bottom against the chair back, try to pass your clenched fist between the back of your calf and the front of your office chair. If you can't do that easily, then the office chair is too deep. You will need to adjust the backrest forward, insert a low back support (such as a lumbar support cushion, a pillow or rolled up towel), or get a new office chair.

4. Low back support: Your bottom should be pressed against the back of your chair, and there should be a cushion that causes your lower back to arch slightly so that you don't slump forward or slouch down in the chair as you tire. This low back support in the office chair is essential to minimize the load (strain) on your back.

5. Resting eye level: Close your eyes while sitting comfortably with your head facing forward. Slowly open your eyes. Your gaze should be aimed at the center of your computer screen. If your computer screen is higher or lower than your gaze, you need to either raise or lower it to reduce neck strain.

6. Armrest: Adjust the armrest of the office chair so that it just slightly lifts your arms at the shoulders. Use of an armrest on your office chair is important to take some of the strain off your neck and shoulders, and it should make you less likely to slouch forward in your chair.

If you are interested in getting an ergonomic assessment, please call Chad Seerup in Human Resources at 403.440.6048 to set up an appointment.