

ERGO TIPS

Low Back Pain

Dentists and the dental team spend many hours a day assuming physically stressful body postures as they provide oral health care.

This can ultimately contribute to the development or aggravation of low back pain, impacting not only the well being of the individual, but the efficiency and productivity of the office as well.

Symptoms

Low back pain may include aching, throbbing or stiffness in the lumbar and sacral areas of the back, and may also be experienced as sharp and piercing pain. It may also be experienced as numbness, tingling and /or shooting pain radiating down the back of the legs and into the feet and toes, or as weakness in the hips, legs, feet or toes.

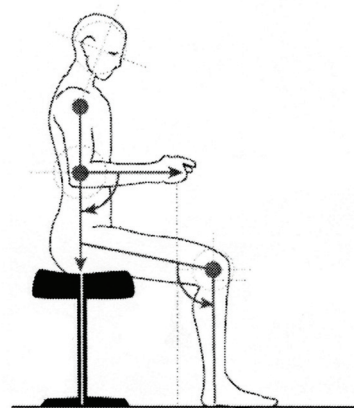
Causes

The cause of low back pain can be varied and complex. But very common sources of pain are tiny tears and inflammation of the muscles, tendons and ligaments supporting the spinal column, and pressure on nerve roots from vertebral changes, such as herniated discs, narrowing of joint spaces, and/or stenosis of the vertebral canal or foramen. There are also times when the cause of the pain is not known and this is often referred to as non-specific low back pain.

Tips For Controlling Low Back Pain

Properly balanced posture and mindful use of one's body may decrease cumulative trauma and may control the amount of pain one experiences.

- Adjust the height of your seat so that your feet can be flat on the floor and your knees are a little below the level of your hips (your thighs are slanted slightly downward). Allow the thighs to be supported.



Leg Balanced Seating

Leg balanced sitting provides traditional support
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- Use proper lighting and magnification to reduce the amount of bending and twisting you must do to see the field of your work.
- Let the loops do the work, not your back/neck.
- Have your equipment and instruments placed so that you are not twisting to reach for them.

Low Back Pain

- Position yourself, relative to the patient, so that you do not have to twist or maintain an unbalanced posture to gain access to the oral cavity (sitting in a 12:00 position is ideal). Move the position of the patient, rather than bending and twisting your body, to do your work.
- Have a musculoskeletal evaluation and foot screening to see whether orthotics could be useful in easing the stress on your back.
- Take a few minutes every hour to stretch the spine, moving backwards and forwards if you have been standing up straight, or moving in the opposite direction of a posture you have been holding.
- If standing for a long period of time, rest one foot on a small stool or step, alternating feet; also alternate doing this with standing on both feet.
- Rotate the scheduling of long, difficult cases with short, easier cases.
- Take a break in between or during long cases.
- Wear properly fitting, comfortable clothing, sterile gloves, masks, and shoes.
- Develop your core strength and lose excess abdominal weight to lessen the burden on your back.
- Exhaust all conservative treatment options before considering surgical intervention, unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- After mild trauma, such as slipping and landing on buttocks, in those older than 50 years
- When sleep is disrupted or pain is worse at rest
- With a history of prolonged steroid use
- With a history of osteoporosis
- With a history of recent infection or a temperature over 100° F
- With a prior history of cancer or night pain
- Loss of bowel or bladder function
- Numbness or tingling in the groin or lower extremities

Seek Medical Consultation

Seek medical consultation for low back pain, especially in the following instances:

- After recent significant trauma such as a fall from a height, a motor vehicle accident or other such accidents

Other Resources

American College of Sports Medicine
www.acsm.org

American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons
www.aaos.org

McKenzie Institute International
www.mckenziemdt.org

Athlete's Performance
www.athletesperformance.com

Arthritis Foundation
www.arthritis.org

American Physical Therapy Association
www.apta.org

Healthy People 2010
www.healthypeople.gov

North American Spine Society
www.spine.org

ADA American
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Association®
America's leading
advocate for oral health

alliance
An OSHA Cooperative Program