

spotlight on health

Is Lower Back Pain A Barrier To Your Fitness Routine?

(NAPSA)—Regular exercise is an important component of any balanced, healthy lifestyle. Unfortunately, for many people chronic lower back pain makes exercise—or just about any other type of activity—painful and sometimes impossible.

Lower back pain affects each of us at some point in our lives and is one of the leading causes for physician visits. According to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS), approximately six million Americans each year see their physician because of lower back pain, and nearly 500,000 require hospitalization.

However, as medical professionals learn more about the causes and effects of chronic back pain, their approaches to treatment are changing. For example, fewer doctors prescribe bed rest. Not only can that course of treatment result in stiff or weakened muscles, but physical inactivity can lead to more serious long-term problems, such as weight gain, heart disease and diabetes. Today's patients have a range of treatment options, with most encouraging at least some type of physical activity.

Experts say that moderate exercise, three to five times per week, will not only improve overall fitness but will also decrease the likelihood of further back injury. Here are a few tips from the *North American Spine Society* and *The Physician and Sportsmedicine Journal* to help get you back to a regular exercise regimen:



You don't have to let your lower back problems prevent you from staying in shape.

- Use physician-approved stretches to loosen the lower and upper back and related muscles, including hamstrings and quadriceps.
- Strengthen muscles that support the back and work to improve the back's flexibility.
- Do exercise with proper form to maximize benefits and minimize strain.

"We always try to perform treatments that help patients maintain and even increase their level of activity. A person in good physical shape is much less likely than an inactive one to injure their back during work or daily activities," says Nagy Mekhail, M.D., Ph.D., chairman of the Department of Pain Management at the Cleveland Clinic. "Healthy living means lower-back-pain sufferers see better results. Those who cannot be active take longer to recover."

When lower back pain interferes with daily activities and exercise, patients should consult a physician to learn more about their condition and treatment options.

For some patients, nonoperative therapeutic treatments such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and physical therapy may provide relief. For others, lower back pain can be traced to the slow degeneration of the vertebral discs, a condition known as chronic "disc-related or discogenic" lower back pain. With age or injury, cracks and fissures may develop in the wall of the disc. Small nerve endings find their way into the cracks causing chronic pain. Patients with this type of pain may benefit from aggressive procedures such as spinal fusion and disc replacement surgery or minimally invasive approaches, such as the Intradiscal ElectroThermal Therapy™ (IDET™) procedure.

Clinical studies indicate that 60 to 80 percent of IDET procedure patients achieve a 50 percent reduction in lower back pain following the procedure. Studies also show that patients require less medication after the procedure to manage pain, and are more likely to return to work.

To learn more and to find a physician who performs minimally invasive procedures for treating chronic lower back pain, use the Physician Locator at www.idetprocedure.com.