Overweight? It Could Be The Cause Of Your Back Pain

(NAPSA)—Here's news a lot of Americans shouldn't take lying down. A national survey to measure the impact of obesity on back pain revealed an increasing trend in the number of overweight and obese patients being treated for spine-related disorders—up nearly 67 percent from just five years ago. In fact, just carrying an extra 20 pounds can cause back pain. According to the survey, taken by the North American Spine Society (NASS), 44 percent of the patients they see are considered obese.

Obesity affects more than 60 million Americans each year and has been directly correlated with causing diabetes, heart disease and even death. Recently, NASS kicked off its fourth annual patient education campaign, "Take a Load off Your Back," to also focus widespread attention on the debilitating effects of obesity on the spine.

In conjunction with the awareness campaign, NASS produced an educational video focusing on obesity's impact on patients' back pain and encourages doctor, patient and community involvement to carefully monitor the epidemic of obesity and back pain prevention.

According to Dr. Tom Facizewski, a leading orthopedic surgeon at the Marshfield Clinic in Wisconsin and a NASS member, "People are coming in not by dozens but in droves because of obesity and their back pain."

Dr. Facizewski is not alone in his observation. A startling 87 percent of spine professionals surveyed agree that obesity plays a significant role in back pain. The vast majority of those surveyed (94

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percent) also said they recommend weight loss as a treatment option for their obese patients and, in follow-up treatment for patients who lose the weight, 55 percent found a significant improvement in their patients' symptoms as a direct result of the weight loss.

Physical activity is extremely important and the most often prescribed treatment for spine health since a patient's back joints and discs rely on motion to keep them healthy. The spine specialists at NASS offer these important tips to help patients lose the extra weight and "take a load off their backs."

1. Eat a sensible, balanced diet. Extremely restrictive diets can cause loss of muscle and bone density in addition to fat.

2. Make sure you get enough calcium and vitamin D daily. Calcium is normally excreted from the body every day. When we don't replace it, the body steals calcium from bones.

3. Stop smoking! Smokers are more prone to back pain than non-smokers because nicotine restricts the flow of blood to the discs that cushion the vertebrae of your spine.

4. Bring an extra pillow to bed. Sleeping on your back puts 55 lbs. of pressure on your spine. Putting a couple of pillows under your knees cuts the pressure in half. Lying on your side with a pillow between your knees also reduces the pressure.

5. Start a strength training program. Resistance training not only increases strength, it has also been shown to improve balance, reducing the risk of injury, and can help maintain bone mass.

6. Stretch throughout the day. Stretching keeps your muscles flexible and helps avoid injury.

7. Stand up straight. Bad posture can worsen back pain. This is especially true if you have excess weight in the form of a "beer belly."

8. Check in with your doctor. You should have a physical examination before starting a weight loss and exercise program to ensure that you don't have any underlying health risks that may require special precautions.

For more information on spine health, visit www.spine.org. Instructions for home exercises can be found in the "For Spine Patients" section.

The North American Spine Society (NASS) is a multidisciplinary organization that advances quality spine care through education, research and advocacy.