

## Stay Healthy to Prevent Back Pain

In many ways your back is like your heart—it's adversely affected by some of the same bad habits. "Lifestyle factors play a bigger role in back pain than many people realize," says physical medicine specialist Sanghoon Kim, M.D., of Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network. Here are some of those factors, and what you can do about them:



- **Sedentary lifestyle**—Strong core (torso) muscles are important for a healthy back. It's hard to have strong abdominals, obliques and back muscles if you don't exercise. Being sedentary also can make a strained muscle feel worse because you stiffen up.
- **Unhealthy diet**—Poor nutrition can lead to weight problems, which means excess pounds for your back to support. It also may mean you don't get enough bone-building nutrients, like calcium, raising your risk for osteoporosis.
- **Smoking**—Tobacco use may decrease the oxygen supply to your body, slowing the healing process after a back strain. It also weakens bones.
- **Stress**—Do you literally "carry the weight of the world on your shoulders?" When you're stressed, you tend to hunch over, causing muscle spasms and tension headaches.

Doing your part keep your back strong and healthy is important, even if you've had back surgery to correct a serious problem. "Back surgery is not a quick fix," says Kim's colleague, orthopedic surgeon Amir Fayyazi, M.D. "It can take months to feel better, and it's essential to build those core muscles and take other precautions so you'll prevent future problems."



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