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## **Back Pain: Separating Fact from Fiction**

Whether you work a job that requires a lot of heavy lifting or sitting at a desk all day, you've probably heard plenty about back pain-and you may have experienced it first-hand. About 80 percent of all adults in the U.S. have experienced back pain at some point, according to the Consumer Reports Health Ratings Center.

In 2009, the Center surveyed more than 14,000 subscribers who experienced lower back pain in the past year but never had surgery. More than half said the pain severely limited their daily routine for a week or longer and 88 percent said the pain recurred throughout the year.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of back pain misconceptions and myths floating around out there. Read on to learn the truth about back pain and the best ways to treat it.

### **Surgery isn't always the best solution**

Many people falsely believe that surgery is the only solution for a slipped disk (also known as a herniated or ruptured disk). However, this is not necessarily the case. First of all, most back pain is not caused by a herniated disk. Oftentimes, it's simply a pulled muscle or another problem that will heal on its own.

Back pain is extremely complex, and each case is unique. As a matter of fact, doctors cannot make a specific diagnosis for more than 70 percent of patients with chronic back pain.

Therefore, you shouldn't assume that you need surgery as soon as your back starts aching. Your doctor will have to put you through some extensive testing to determine if your pain is coming from a damaged disk. Even if the doctor does confirm that you have a slipped disk, you may be able to recover without surgery.

Some studies show that about 90 percent of patients with a herniated disk gradually improve within 6 weeks. If your pain persists for longer, then you may be a good candidate for surgery. However, because back surgery can be extremely invasive and require lengthy amounts of recovery time, you should view it as a last resort.

### **You may not need to take it easy**

Another common misconception is if your back hurts, you should take it easy and get plenty of rest until the pain subsides. However, many medical experts say exactly the opposite-if your back hurts, you should try to continue your every day activities. People who stay active tend to heal more quickly than those who banish themselves to bed rest.

Of course, if you are experiencing severe pain, you may need to take some time off from work, especially if you have a physically demanding job. However, you may consider coming to the jobsite for some light work until you recover fully. This will give you an opportunity to stretch your back and remain somewhat active while your back heals.

### **Not all back pain is caused by an accident or heavy lifting**

Although you may be quick to assume that your back pain was caused by lifting something heavy, but that may not be the case. Of course, people with physically demanding jobs that involve a lot of lifting and carrying of heavy materials are more likely to experience lower back pain. However, there are many other causes for back pain, as well.

As a matter of fact, people who sit still at a desk all day long are actually at higher risk for a disk injury than those who do moderate amounts of physical work. That's because these desk workers remain sedentary for much of the day, sitting in unnatural positions in front of a computer and placing constant pressure on their spine.

There are many other factors that contribute to back pain, as well. For example, your age can play a role, as well as your gender. Men are more likely to injure their back when they're around 40 years old, while women generally suffer from back pain between the ages of 50 and 60. Your lifestyle can also affect back pain. Smoking, obesity and stress are often linked to lower back pain.

### **A back injury doesn't mean the end of your career**

In the past, many workers assumed that if they injured their back, they would never be the same again and would be unable to return to their job. However, most people who experience back pain eventually get better-with or without treatment.

Studies show that most people who take time off from work due to back pain return to the job within six weeks. Only a small percentage of people never return to work again after a back injury.

Unfortunately, once you've suffered from back pain, you're most likely going to experience it again at some point. Luckily, even these recurring incidences of back pain will generally go away on its own.

### **There are many treatment options**

If you're suffering from severe back pain, don't feel like you're alone. You can turn to many different types of experts to help you manage the pain and recover.

First and foremost, visit a trusted family physician. He or she can rule out a serious health problem and may be able to refer you to a specialist. Many back pain sufferers turn to chiropractors, physical therapists, pain management doctors and other specialists. While back pain usually resolves on its own within time, these experts can help you through the pain, give you valuable advice and offer you some relief.