



Weill Cornell Medicine

Brain & Spine Center

10 Rules for a Healthy Back

- 1. Exercise regularly.** Exercise is critical to muscle strength—and strong back muscles help support your spinal column. Wall squats and leg lifts are good for your back, and many yoga poses help keep your back muscles strong.
- 2. Keep your back straight.** Your mother was right—good posture helps keep your spine healthy by allowing it to maintain its natural shape and keeping blood flowing. Poor posture can stress your spinal column and constrict blood flow.
- 3. Kneel to bend.** Bending at the waist puts pressure on your spinal column—bend your knees and lower your whole body when you need to bend, rather than folding over at the waist.
- 4. Don't lift heavy objects.** Your back wasn't designed for lifting heavy objects—use rolling suitcases, hand trucks, or other devices meant to carry the load for you.
- 5. Spread out loads evenly, and keep them next to your body.** Don't try to carry a heavy load on one side of your body—it puts pressure on your vertebrae – and don't carry anything at arm's length. If you must carry a load, keep it centered and close to your body. That goes for kids, too—don't let them carry a heavy backpack slung over one shoulder.
- 6. When sitting, keep your back straight and support your upper body.** Keeping your back straight when sitting keeps it in its proper position and reduces pressure on your vertebrae.
- 7. Do not stand with straight legs.** Keeping your knees “soft,” rather than locked straight, when you stand reduces stress on your spinal column.
- 8. When lying down, keep your legs bent.** Keeping your legs bent when lying down allows your spine to maintain its natural shape. Lying flat (either face up or face down) forces your spine to either flex or extend and puts pressure on your discs.
- 9. Do sports, particularly swimming, running, or cycling.** Many sports provide a good workout without seeming like work. Get your exercise by swimming, running, cycling, or engaging in other sports that get your heart pumping and your muscles moving.
- 10. Train your spinal muscles every day.** Teach your spinal muscles to support your spinal column—exercise to keep them strong.

