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WAYS TO TAKE COMPLETE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR BACK PAIN

For all pains related to the musculoskeletal
system

Introduction

Hi there,

Is back pain* affecting you on the job? Or your ability to take care of your family? We know how frustrating it can be.

We have purposefully designed this handout to give you (and your back) a helping hand. These simple, yet effective strategies will help you to feel and perform better in no time.

We hope that you will find at least one of these strategies helpful in your pursuit toward a pain-free existence.

We wish you the best of luck on your journey.

Best regards,

Dr Anders (Chiropractor)

*Back pain is used as an umbrella term for all pain and discomfort related to the spine and musculoskeletal system. The strategies in this article works well for lower-back pain, middle-back pain, neck pain and the majority of other musculoskeletal pain.



1. Rest is not the answer

Rest is important, but you'll be surprised to know that the true key to a fast recovery is movement. The best way to approach pain is to first identify where the pain is stemming from (see point 4). Once you have identified the location of your pain, you need to discover if the pain is worse with movement or rest. You can simply do this by going for a 15 minute walk. If the pain gets worse with movement, you should seek advice from a health professional. We recommend you contact your local chiropractor or physiotherapist.

If your pain does not get worse or improves with movement, you have just unlocked the key to your recovery. The golden rule for pain management is to move as much as you can without it making the pain worse. If the pain increases during or after activity, you are overdoing it. If your pain stays the same or improves during or after activity, you can gently increase the intensity and duration of your activity.

You simply apply this rule to every activity you do, and over a period of time, you should see an improvement in fitness and a reduction in pain. It is critical that you don't push through the pain, because this will most likely make your condition worse.

2. You're stretching way too hard

Stretching can be great to alleviate pain associated with muscle tightness. However, most people stretch too hard and not long enough, particularly when they are in pain.

A muscle is made out of a bundle of fibres. When you stretch a muscle, you are elongating these muscle fibres. The problem with stretching while there is pain is that you are potentially tearing muscle fibres, which weakens the muscle instead of relieving it. If you apply too much stretch to the painful area you are only creating more irritation, which leads to more inflammation and pain.

Start off gently and hold the stretch for 2 to 10 minutes. Gradually add more pressure as your muscles warm up. Repeat the stretch three times on each leg. For a total of 6 to 30 minutes per leg. It should feel like a deep but gentle stretch, and there should be zero aggravation of your pain. Aim to stretch 3 times per week.

3. The pain is in your head

Pain is a sensation created by the brain to warn you about something (i.e. tissue damage). The brain is usually fairly good at locating the area of "injury", however, the intensity of the pain can sometimes be misinterpreted by the brain. However, it is still important for you to listen to what the brain is trying to tell you. This can often be challenging to do without medical training, but there are a few important things you can do:

- a) Don't take pain medication unless it is absolutely necessary, and never take pain medications before an activity. This will mask the pain and give you a false sense of security. Ideally, you should only take pain medication if the pain is preventing you from sleeping.
- b) Find the position when sleeping that gives you the least amount of discomfort and the most relief. You will most likely do this naturally.
- c) Use an ice pack to take the edge off the pain. Do this after activity, for 5-10 minutes at the time, and repeat 3-5 times per day.
- d) Focus on the positive aspects of your pain journey. This is definitely easier said than done, but try your best to focus on what works instead of what doesn't. Don't lay in bed thinking about what hurts, instead get up and get going with your day and work toward what helps. Negative emotions are not

going to help with your recovery. A great technique is to re-emphasise all the positive emotions you have related to your injury. Eg. "Today I can lift my child up with less pain compared to last week".

- e) Try mindfulness or meditation. This can help with how you process pain and in reducing stress. An app such as "Headspace" is a great place to start.

4. Localise your pain

The reason why you want to know more about the location of your pain is so you can more specifically track your progress, better understand your body and identify what movements are making you feel better (or worse). Start off by applying pressure to the parts of your body that hurt the most. If your pain is more generalised or it's too painful to press on, we recommend that you seek advice from a health professional such as a chiropractor or physiotherapist.

If the pain is manageable and easily localised, start experimenting with the movements you can and cannot do. Eg. squats, bike riding, walking, deadlifts etc.

You can then apply the golden rule of pain management (see point 1), and track your progress over time, making sure to adapt the movements based on your symptoms.

5. Adopt the professional athlete mindset

A professional athlete's worst nightmare is injury. An injury prevents them from doing their job. It is in the athletes' best interest to get back to movement as soon as possible. They will therefore attack the problem head on, be proactive and do their rehabilitation as prescribed. Most non-athletes don't have the same support network as a professional, but you can still adopt the same mentality.

A very common mistake people in pain make is that they assume it will get better with time. This is sometimes the case, but certainly not always. The best way to approach an injury or pain is by taking a proactive approach early on (which you already are by reading this article). You'll find that it will be easier to manage and most likely a more rapid road to recovery and getting back to doing what you love.

If you are still in the same or worse pain after 2-3 weeks, we recommend that you seek advice from a health professional such as a chiropractor or physiotherapist.

The next time you are injured, think like an athlete and get back to doing what you love as soon as possible.

6. Don't identify as "the guy with back pain"

This is probably the most important point of this article. Pain can be very uncomfortable and can bring out the worst in us. It is important to adopt the recommendations earlier in this article as soon as possible. This can prevent the pain from becoming chronic. Unfortunately, a large proportion of the public are living with chronic pain, and they are doing their best to deal with it.

If you identify an area of pain, locate it as specifically as you can, find out which movements you can and cannot do, and then adopt a professional athlete's mindset to get back to doing what you love as soon as possible.

Once pain has "settled" in your body, and has been there for more than six months, it can be very tricky to get rid of. In this instance, be very careful of accepting the pain as part of your identity, and avoid saying to yourself such things as: "I cannot do X because of my back", "I will have back pain for the rest of my life". Everybody has pain in one way or another, but it is how you deal with it that makes the difference. Try to think about pain as an opportunity to become better, stronger and healthier.

In summary

This article was written to help you with your pain so you can get back to doing what matters the most. We hope that it has added value to your life, and that it has made your approach to pain a more positive and proactive one. If not, feel free to reach out with feedback or questions. We would love to hear from you.

Are you still experiencing pain after implementing these strategies?

Let us know how we can help by calling 0499 344 357 or emailing us at admin@forwardchiropractic.com.au