



TRIGGER POINT

Sleeping awkwardly

You might not think that a restful activity like sleeping could cause back pain, but it depends on how you are positioned in bed. Peter Friar, resident physiotherapist with Mammoth Sport (mammothsport.com), advises against sleeping on your front. "This can lead to cervical spine (neck) damage due to extreme neck positioning and low back pain due to the resultant extension position poorly tolerated by many individuals," he explains.

"To demonstrate this, pull your little finger gently back to its furthest available range and hold it there. This is an 'awkward' end of range position that many people find themselves sleeping in.

Now imagine holding that position for eight hours and the pain that would result when returning the finger back to a normal 'neutral' position."



PREVENTION TIPS

"Most back pain sufferers can benefit from finding the right combination of sleeping position and mattress," says Peter. "Mattress selection is crucial to a good night's sleep and avoidance of long-term spinal damage. I advocate the Mammoth mattress because of its ability to fully support the spine in any position. Pillows should hold your neck in a relatively neutral position. In other words, the position your head and neck would be in when holding 'good posture'."

TRIGGER POINT

Lifting heavy objects

One of the most common reasons for back injuries is lifting heavy objects incorrectly. "Bending from the waist increases the stress on your lower back, whilst keeping your knees straight can lead to over-stretching," warns Rishi Loatey, British Chiropractic Association Chiropractor (chiropractic-uk.co.uk). "Lifting with your arms straight out also adds extra pressure to your back, as does twisting from the waist. Lifting heavy objects in the wrong way can cause increased load and pressure on the back or the discs and joints in the spine leading to discomfort and loss of joint movement if not treated effectively."

PREVENTION TIPS

Firstly, face the direction in which you want to carry the weight. Always lift using a relaxed, straight back. Legs should be hip-width apart, knees bent. Keep your head and shoulders directly above your waist and keep the weight you are carrying as close to you as possible.

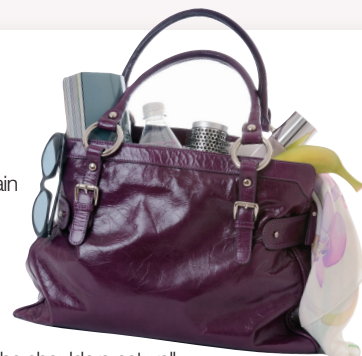
Avoid bending from the waist, which increases the stress on your lower back. Never keep the knees straight, as this will lead to over-stretching and damage to your back, and never lift while twisting from the waist. Don't lift with your arms straight out, keep the elbows bent and to your side to minimise the stress on your back.

Putting the weight down can often cause just as many injuries as lifting it. If possible, put the weight on something waist height rather than the floor.

TRIGGER POINT

Carrying heavy bags

"The heavier the bag, the more it will strain the spine and body framework," warns osteopath Alan O Szmelskyj (hunts-osteopaths.co.uk). "This is because the more a bag weighs the more the body adopts a compensatory posture in response to the weight. For example, if the shoulders naturally slope down then there may be a tendency for the strap of the bag to slide down which is counteracted by raising the shoulder. This can result in shoulder and neck pain as well as headaches. Further down the spine, backache can develop, as the lower spine is also asymmetrically loaded."



PREVENTION TIPS

Alan recommends carrying your bag close to your body to minimise damage to the spine. "Use a lightweight rucksack or backpack with wide padded shoulder straps worn over both shoulders," he adds. If this isn't possible then Alan recommends regularly swapping the side you carry your bag on. Also, try carrying a bag with long straps diagonally across the body, again changing sides regularly. He adds: "With shopping bags, spread the load and carry them as short a distance as possible. If the load is very heavy use a pull-along case, swapping the side on which you pull it."

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the charity BackCare, four out of every five adults will experience some form of back pain in their lives, costing the NHS a whopping £1 billion a year.

READER OFFER

STOP back & Hip Pain by Helen Brister is a set of two CDs featuring exercise routines to eliminate back and hip pain. The set normally costs £34.99 including p&p, but *Natural Health* readers can take advantage of a £5 discount off the total price. This offer is available until 30th September. Visit stopbackandhippain.com

