

Stress and Your Spine

Lifting is not the only kind of physical stress that can damage your spine. Small repetitive movements, falls, sleeping incorrectly, and long periods of sitting are other examples.

Get a Back-Friendly Bed

When choosing a bed consider how much of your life is spent in bed - about one third.

Vertebral subluxations often occur while sleeping and many sleep-related backaches are caused by a mattress that is too soft.

The bed should be firm. An orthopaedically designed box spring and mattress is the best.

The idea is to keep your spine straight when lying on your side, and to support your normal spinal curvatures when on your back.

Imagine a line drawn through the ear, the shoulder, and the hip joints on one side of your body; if the line is straight, then the bed is OK for you. If you share a bed with someone, make sure that he or she is also lying in the bed before trying this out, because the change in weight will definitely make a difference. Or consider a bed with separate mattresses. Throw out any beds that sag or the springs have broken. Also consider getting a new bed if it is older than 7 to 10 years.

Stretch Before Getting Up

Try something as simple as lying on your back and reaching both arms as far over your head as you comfortably can. Then point your toes toward the foot of the bed.

Try not to sleep on your stomach. Having your neck turned for a long period places a great deal of stress on your cervical vertebrae and can cause subluxations.

Your pillow... should allow your neck to be straight when lying on your side. Usually the ideal height is the distance between the end of your shoulder and your neck. When lying on your back a small pillow should be enough to raise the head slightly off the bed. Some pillows are also designed to support the normal curve in your neck. From our experience, most people have a pillow that is too high.

Take frequent breaks when sitting for long periods.

Go to <https://www.acc.co.nz/preventing-injury/keeping-you-safe/> for injury prevention and health and safety advice .

Check your workspace is ergonomically correct. Is your computer screen directly in front of you and your chair and desk at the correct height? Hands should be below your elbows and your shoulders down & relaxed. Go to <https://worksafe.govt.nz/topic-and-industry/work-related-health/ergonomics/> for more information.

Avoid high-heeled shoes, especially when standing for long periods.

Avoid standing for long periods on concrete floors. If possible, request a rubber matt.

Physical stress is also only one cause of vertebral subluxations. **Chemical stresses** such as from tobacco smoke, alcohol, dehydration & a poor diet can have a major impact on your spine. What you put into your body can also greatly affect the energy your body has to fight off injuries.

- Eat power foods. Power foods are high in complex carbohydrates and low in simple sugars and fat and contain an adequate amount of protein. Eat lots of live foods i.e. fruits and vegetables, not foods filled with preservatives.
- Vitamins and minerals are also important; they play a critical role in your body's ability to release the energy from foods and in keeping your body healthy. Remember to get enough calcium and vitamin D to keep your bones strong and resilient.
- Limit soft drinks, candy bars, ice cream, biscuits, and other sweets, because they provide too much energy too quickly for the body to use. They can also lower your immune system.
- The most important meal of the day is breakfast, because as you sleep, the energy stored in your liver is depleted by the brain and other organs. When you wake up, about 95 percent of this reserve is gone. Give your body, spine and nervous system the energy it needs.
- Maintain the energy your body needs throughout the day by consuming five or six small meals per day rather than two or three large ones. Research has shown that the routine of smaller, more frequent meals is much more effective in meeting the body's energy needs and reducing the storage of body fat than the traditional three-meal diet. Just be sure that you choose healthy foods.

Mental & emotional stress can be just as damaging, and many people encounter stressful situations daily. The tension created by emotional stress can cause tight back muscles and subluxations that if left uncorrected can set you up for a serious back injury and/or poor health as a result of nerve interference.

- Learn to relieve stress e.g. listen to some relaxing music, visualisation, meditation.
- Avoid stressful situations when possible e.g. avoid peak hour traffic or busy times at the supermarket.
- Avoid stimulants that can have the effect of creating a sense of anxiety even when you aren't anxious about anything e.g. caffeine and nicotine.