



Your spine is a complex structure of vertebrae bones, muscles, ligaments and nerves that are all capable of producing neck and back pain, one of the leading causes of disability for those over 45, says Dr. Natalia Lishchyna, an Oakville chiropractor and vice-president of the Ontario Chiropractic Association (OCA). “This group is prone to having pain from previous trauma, like an accident or fall, repetitive work tasks and osteoarthritis which worsens with immobility,” Lishchyna says. Neck and back pain is often not a quick or easy fix. Treatment options range from non-invasive care, like lifestyle changes, medication and physical therapy, to invasive measures such as surgery. Prevention and proper treatment are important factors in controlling spine pain.

PAIN PREVENTION STRATEGIES

- **Maintain a Healthy Weight** Being overweight puts pressure on nerves, muscles and bone structures of the spine.
- **Be Active and Exercise** “Exercise – be it a walk in the park or swimming – three times a week for 30 minutes is one of the best treatments for back and neck pain,” Lishchyna says. Take frequent breaks from the computer or desk, stretching, walking more (even when you don’t have to) and other activities.
- **Get Some Sleep** That’s when the body actually restores itself. “Sleeping on your side or back is considered better than sleeping on the stomach, which puts the wrong type of stress on your back and neck,” Lishchyna says. She advises you toss the big pillows for a smaller size that fits the width from your neck to ear.
- **Choose a Healthy Diet** Get enough calcium and vitamin D in your diet to prevent bone weakening osteoporosis.

SEASONAL SAFETY TIPS

- **Autumn Leaf Clean-Up** Stand straight and walk to the leaves instead of bending at the waist to reach them. Rake straight back toward you. Pick up in smaller quantities, keep the load closer to body, bend at the knees to get down instead of bending your back. Don’t twist the body. When cutting branches, don’t lift – pull. Place the leaves and yard waste in small bags or a wheelbarrow to transport. Don’t overfill and don’t be a hero – get help from others when a load is too heavy.
- **Snow-Shovelling Safety Tips** Use a lightweight pusher-type shovel. Always push the snow to the side rather than throw it. If you’re going to lift, bend at the knee, keep your load close to your body. Turn and walk with your load rather than twisting around and putting it down.

SPINE PAIN TREATMENT

- **Visit Your Chiropractor** Chiropractors use a form of treatment called an adjustment to align the bones of the spine and relieve pain, Lishchyna explains. Some chiropractors prefer to use soft tissue techniques such as Myofascial Release Therapy (MRT) and Registered Massage Therapy instead of adjustments.

Chinese massotherapy, also known as Tuina, works by applying pressure with hands and fingers to acupoints, meridians and groups of muscles or nerves in order to treat lower back pain, with a documented 89 per cent reduction in pain compared with physical therapy treatments (i.e., icing, ultrasound, heat therapy, exercise, deep tissue massage) according to a 2006 article published in the *British Medical Journal*. “Tuina is effective because it works with the body’s energy circulation and blood flow circulation,” says Craig Cormack, a Montreal-based registered Chinese massotherapist (www.risingtao.ca) and consultant at the McGill University Sports Medicine Clinic. He uses Tuina to clear out toxins, reduce blockages and regulate the flow of energy along the meridians to relieve back pain.

- **Surgery** “These days, surgeries and equipment used are much more advanced and people recuperate much faster,” Lishchyna states. “Disc herniation surgeries [repairing discs that have shifted, protrude and bulge] are less invasive [now considered a day surgery procedure], and post-surgery rehabilitation starts much sooner since prolonged bed rest can be detrimental,” she adds.

Dr. W. Mark Erwin, assistant professor, orthopedic surgery, University of Toronto, elaborates: “For patients suffering from arm or leg pain due to a piece of the disc that has herniated, only the herniated piece is removed, and there is no replacement. In the case of an extensive degenerative disc disease in the neck, as opposed to a herniated disc, it is common to remove the entire disc and replace it with bone [a spinal fusion] or, in some cases, an artificial disc.” —*Charmaine Gooden*