7 Highly Effective Treatments for Back Pain

by MARLENE WALLACE

Using Back Pain Treatments to Manage Chronic Back Pain

Back pain is extremely common. It manifests itself as upper back, middle or lower back pain with and without sciatica. Let's take a look at some back pain treatments that work.

Lower back pain affects 85 percent of the adult population and is the fifth most common reason why individuals go to see their doctors. This is the type of back pain that I have suffered from, for approximately 20 years.

What Causes Back Pain?

There are various causes of back pain including:

- Lifelong poor back health habits (e.g., slouching).
- Physical injuries (e.g., motor vehicle accidents, slips, falls, etc.).
- Strained back muscles.
- Sports injuries.

The initial cause of my back pain was falling off of a neighbor’s front porch during an ice storm. This acute injury eventually became a chronic problem. Osteoarthritis developed within the injured vertebrae of my lumbar spine.

Symptoms of Back Pain and Risk Factors

Associated signs and symptoms of back pain may include:

- Painful, achy muscles.
- Pain described as shooting or stabbing.
- Pain that radiates down the legs (i.e., sciatica).
- Limited range of motion and flexibility of the back.

Certain risk factors put you at increased risk:

- Normal aging process. Back pain becomes more prevalent with age.
- Jobs involving heavy lifting or physical labor (e.g., gardening, roofing, construction work, etc.).
- Occupations involving a great deal of walking or standing (e.g., in one spot) (e.g., nurses, cashiers).

My lower back pain takes the form of dull, achy muscles. I have also had painful sciatica radiating down my legs at times. My nursing job aggravated my back pain to the point that I had to retire earlier than I would have liked.

Seeking Treatment

Seeking treatment is very important. While 85 percent of the adult population has lower back pain, it is estimated that only 25 percent receive medical care for their back pain. If you have the opportunity to receive beneficial back pain treatments, why suffer?

I find that a mixture of natural and medical treatments along with certain lifestyle habits works the best:

- **Analgesics and anti-inflammatories:** including the over-the-counter pain medication acetaminophen (Tylenol) for mild to moderate lower back pain. Also, I take a prescription anti-inflammatory known as Naproxen twice a day for severe bouts of back pain.
- **Antidepressant/anti-anxiety drugs:** My doctor prescribed the antidepressant/anti-anxiety drug known as Cymbalta (duloxetine hydrochloride) for my lower back pain. It helps a great deal.
- **Acupuncture/massage/chiropractic treatments:** A “trio” of monthly natural treatments effectively manages my chronic lower back pain. The combination of acupuncture, massage therapy, and chiropractic adjustments usually keeps my back pain under control.
- **Heat/cold applications:** I regularly apply a dry heating pad to my lower back to ease the pain. When I suffer from more severe “flare-ups,” I switch to ice packs to decrease localized inflammation.
- **Cortisone injections:** A few years ago, my lower back pain and related sciatica became so severe that my family doctor referred me to a pain specialist for six monthly cortisone injections. While some studies have indicated that steroidal injections, administered directly into the spine, may not give patients much additional relief, I found they worked very well.
- **Pilates:** Pilates helps my lower back pain. It concentrates on the body’s core, which strengthens the abdominal muscles which in turn strengthens the back muscles and relieves the pain.
- **Rest vs. activity:** I find it necessary to rest my back, over the day, especially if I am working at my computer a lot. In my case, there is a “fine balance” between sitting too long and walking too long. Everyone needs to find their own “balance” and pace themselves to prevent any additional back injury and pain.