The Relationship Between Stress and Back Pain

by JEREMY ETHIER

Stress and Back Pain

Do you often feel overwhelmed, stressed out and full of anxiety? If so, then this may be an underlying cause of your back pain.

If you are prone to anxiety and high stress levels, then it is possible that you have been suffering from regular back pain as a result of your stress and anxiousness.

How Does Stress Contribute to Back Pain?

Now, although stress and anxiety may not directly cause back pain, it can act as an underlying problem that leads to poor behaviors that may result in back pain.

For example, when you are stressed out and sitting down at work what do you usually do? You may not even notice it, but chances are you protrude your head forward, tense up your shoulders and round your back.

Over time this poor posture can create knots, tension and imbalances in your muscles which then causes the pain you feel in your lower and upper back.

The Vicious Stress-Pain-Stress Cycle

If stress is an underlying cause of your back pain, it is easy to get caught in a cycle of pain. It goes as follows:

- Your high stress levels contribute to poor behaviors that lead to back pain.
- The onset of your back pain causes you to refrain from or lower your physical activity due to fear of further pain or injury.
- This inactivity and overall pain lead to further stress which can then worsen the back pain you feel.

As you can see, this cycle has the potential to worsen your back pain drastically. The best way to avoid this is by managing your stress levels.

How to Stop Stress From Contributing to Back Pain

Managing your stress and anxiety levels will do much more than just potentially relieve your back pain. It will help boost your mood, relieve tension and result in an overall happier you. We'll discuss the best methods to manage your stress below:

Massage Therapy

Massaging is a beneficial approach to treating back pain and lowering stress levels. It helps alleviate pain and

increase blood flow to your muscles, and your pain will likely feel much better after a good deep-tissue massage. Treat yourself by booking an hour long deep-tissue massage at least once a month.

Another option is to use self-massage tools. Trigger point massagers are great and easy to use, or you can simply use a lacrosse ball or tennis ball to roll out tight areas in your back, hips and shoulders.

Stretching

Ideally, you should be stretching every day, as it will lengthen muscles that have been shortened and tightened from stress and poor posture. This may help you feel more relieved throughout the day and less tense.

The primary muscles you want to focus on stretching are your upper traps, hamstrings, chest and hip flexors.

Physical Activity

Although it may be tempting to completely stop physical activity during the onset of back pain, this will only make matters worse.

You want to continue doing any activity that doesn't worsen your back pain, and if you are currently sedentary, then you should start increasing your activity level by at least going for a short walk every day.

Specific exercises for back pain will help enhance the release of endorphins which act as natural pain killers, reduce stress and improve sleep. Even activities as simple as walking the dog will make a difference in improving your mood and relieving stress.

Try to fit in at least 30 minutes of activity, regardless of what it is, every day.

Correct Your Posture

When we are overwhelmed, our body wants to conform itself to the most comfortable position, which is what leads to poor posture, shortened muscles and further elevates stress.

Use the following list as various tips to improve your posture when sitting:

- Align your back with the back of your chair.
- Both feet should be flat on the floor.
- Tuck your chin in and ensure that your head is not protruding forward.
- Take frequent walk/stretch breaks to improve blood flow.
- Use a high-quality chair that is ergonomically designed to support your back.
- Adjust your computer screen so that it is eye level.

Not only do the solutions discussed above have the potential to relieve chronic back pain, but they will also brighten your mood, help with stress levels and provide a host of other benefits.

In Conclusion

Keep in mind that it took a long time for your back pain to develop, so you shouldn't expect it to vanish overnight suddenly. By consistently implementing the tips discussed in this article, you will be able to relieve yourself of stress and alleviate your back pain over time.