



Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight throughout the year, including the holiday season, is important for back health. Excessive weight, especially around the waist and stomach, can be taxing on your lower back muscles.

Weight gain can also lead to inactivity which can be a risk factor for back injuries.

For more information, visit www.hss.edu. To make an appointment, call our Physician Referral Service at 800.796.0486.

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Holiday Back Pain

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), over 50,000 people every year sustain some sort of winter-related back injury, and 5,800 of these injuries result from decorating for the holidays. During the holiday time, it's quite possible to injure your neck and back from carrying heavy items, such as large suitcases, decorations and gifts.

"People are running around shopping, they're trying to meet deadlines. People are stuck in traffic and they're in their car longer, which may lead to back and neck pain. They're walking in the mall for hours with heavy packages. It can be an emotional and sad time for people who have lost family members. All of these factors can lead to back pain or make a minor problem worse." says **Dr. Alice Chen**, HSS Physiatrist.

Even though back injuries are common during this time of year, there are things you can do to try and prevent them from occurring.

Try these tips for staying injury free this holiday season:

- Exercise regularly to help strengthen your core muscles (back and abdominal). Exercise also helps reduce the risk that the back pain will return. Remember to consult your physician before beginning any exercise program.
- Monitor your stress levels as stress can make back and neck pain worse.
- If you're traveling far distances, take a break and get out of the car or walk around the airplane every hour to stretch your muscles.
- When lifting, remember to bend from the knees.
- Listen to your body and don't overdo it.
- If you do develop back pain, don't ignore the initial symptoms, seek treatment right away.



Treatment for Lower Back Pain

(From National Institutes of Health)

Most holiday related injuries are classified as acute back pain. Acute back pain usually gets better on its own and without treatment.

However, there are a few things you can do to help with the pain.

- **Use an anti-inflammatory:** Try acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen which may help to ease the pain.
- **Keep moving:** Getting up and moving around can help ease stiffness, relieve pain, and have you back doing your regular activities sooner.
- **Try a hot or cold pack:** Hot or cold packs can soothe sore, stiff backs. For acute or inflammatory issues, ice is best to keep on for 20-30 minutes. Make sure to place a towel between your skin and the ice to avoid burns. This may help relieve the pain; however, it will not cure it.

If the pain does not get better after two days, see a doctor right away. Have a safe and happy holiday season! ■

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